

THE BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE



NOVEMBER, 1920

20 CENTS

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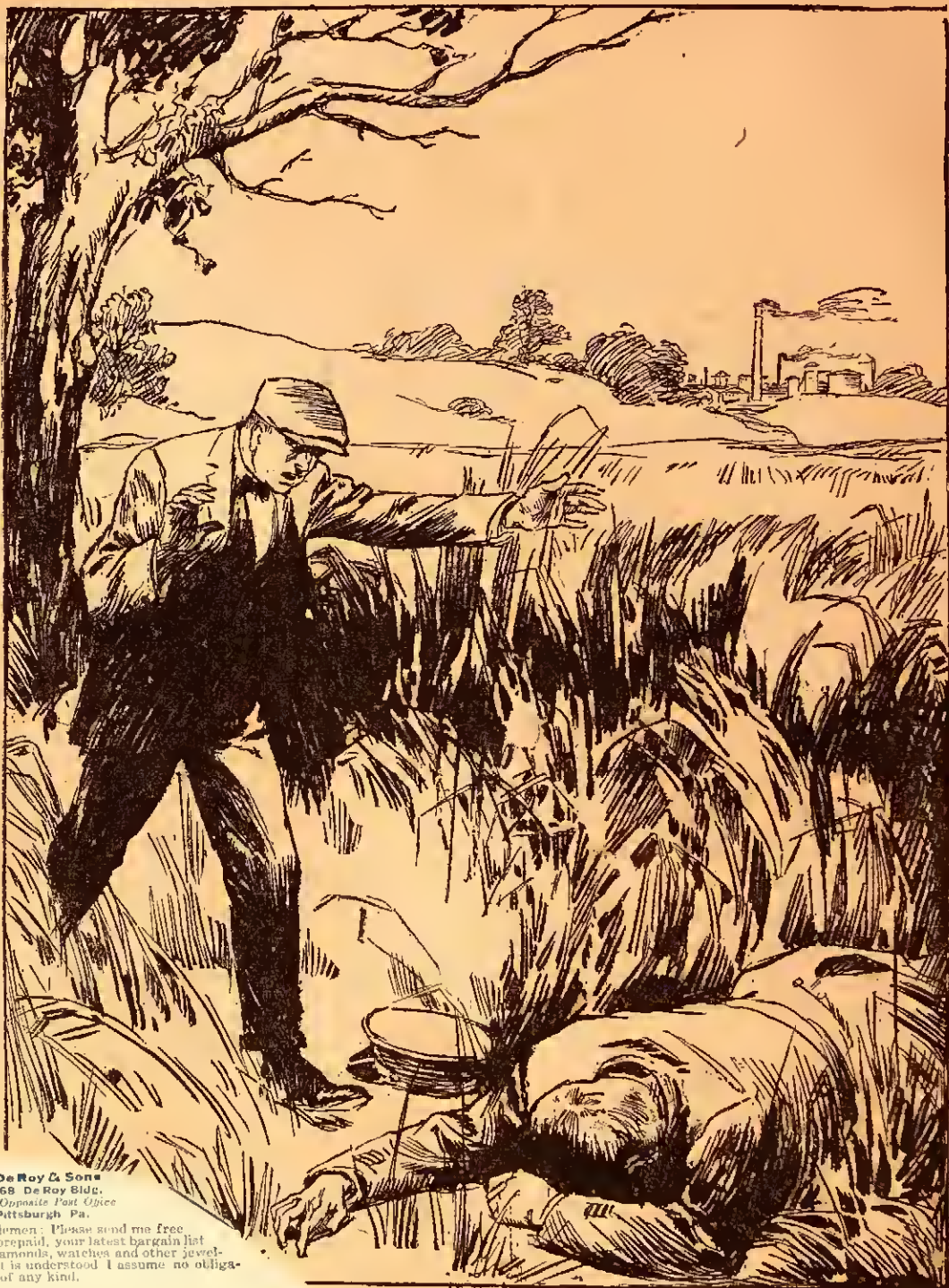
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lay face downward. I sprang forward—Page 12

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*Reverted
for England
7-2-25*

The Man in the Black Mask

(A Complete Mystery Novelette)

By Harold Ward

CHAPTER I

"**I**N accordance with the promise made to you three days ago, at exactly twelve o'clock to-day the tower on the northeast corner of your office will be blown up. I have no desire to shed innocent blood and ask you to see that the vicinity is kept clear of workmen at that hour.

"You will realize that I am under considerable expense and must insist that you reimburse me for the time lost while waiting for you to come to my terms. You will, therefore, add ten thousand dollars to the original sum of fifty thousand dollars asked for, for each week the amount demanded is unpaid.

"Three days from today at the hour of twelve, noon, your office will be demolished unless you grant my demands. Later, we will discuss the question of destroying your entire factory. Let today's explosion be a warning to you that I do not indulge in idle threats.

"THE MAN IN THE BLACK MASK."

* * *

John Grimes, the peppery little president of the Elkhorn Chemical Company, laid the letter on the table before him, removed his glasses, wiped them carefully, then glared at the other members of the board of directors seated before him.

"That is the latest sample of what I have been getting for the past two weeks, Mr. Larson," he said quietly. "We have postponed action until you ar-

rived because, in my estimation, the threats are so different from those of the ordinary blackmailer that they warrant a more than superficial investigation."

"Twaddle!" interrupted weather-beaten old Slocum, the senior member of the board, with an angry snort.

"The work of a crank," declared Innis, the company attorney, suavely. "It is a waste of time to read his letters."

Grimes ignored the interruptions. Waiting a second for the others, none of whom seemed to care to venture an opinion: "Probably no other company in the world has guarded the interests of its employes as has this one," he went on. "For that reason we have never had labor troubles of any kind. Seemingly, our workmen are all satisfied and I cannot bring myself to believe that it is one of them. My fellow directors do not agree with me, but I want your opinion."

I chewed my cigar reflectively for a second. "I doubt if my advice will be worth much to you until I have gone deeper into the matter, Mr. Grimes," I responded. "Remember, I arrived less than an hour ago and know absolutely nothing about conditions except what you have told me. As I understand it, you received your first communication from this mysterious blackmailer—what did you say he calls himself?"

"The Man in the Black Mask," answered Grimes.

"His first letter came several days

ago, as I understand it, warning you of what to expect. Three days ago you received a second communication demanding the sum of fifty thousand dollars, payment to be made in a manner to be designated later. If you agreed, you were to run up a small, white flag on the flag pole. If not, the factory was to be slightly damaged as a proof that he is able to carry out his threats. Am I right so far?"

The gray-haired president nodded.

"I take it that you have all racked your brains thinking of some one who has been injured—or fancied himself injured—in the past. That you were unsuccessful is self-evident, for you have mentioned no such person. That practically eliminates covering that part of the field again. Not having raised the white flag, your mysterious enemy sends you the letter you have just read. Have there been any other communications?"

Grimes snorted. "Letters! Communications! My God! I've been bombarded with them. This one came by mail. When I awoke this morning I found one on my dresser. I find them in my coat pockets and pinned to the door of my room. All along the same line, but shorter. All typewritten."

I raised my eyebrows inquiringly. "It looks like collusion on the part of some one in your own home, if you will pardon the insinuation. Have you questioned your servants?"

The little president motioned towards the big man in uniform at the foot of the table.

"Chief Backus has had them both on the carpet," he responded.

The policeman spoke for the first time.

"It beats me," he rumbled. "The cook's been with him ever since Mrs. Grimes died—twelve years ago. The chauffeur and man of all work entered

his service five years ago. I took no chances, though, and gave 'em both the third degree. I'd gamble my life on it that neither of them knows a thing about the thing.

"The only other member of the household is Mrs. Casey, Mr. Grime's sister—and she's a semi-invalid. Of course there's Miss Joan, his niece—but one might as well suspect Grimes, himself, as a kid like her. Crank or no crank, Mr. Larson, the man who wrote those letters is a smooth proposition or he couldn't have planted them as he did, right under the noses of everybody. Take my advice and do as I do—suspect everybody."

Having thus delivered himself, he settled back in his chair and puffed with noisy energy at his cigar.

Innis laughed good-humoredly.

"The chief really takes the matter seriously, too," he declared. "He's even stationed men around the factory entrances to keep the crowd back at the noon hour, and he's placed a man at the foot of the ladder leading up to the tower, to keep anyone from getting up there and planting explosives."

"Taking no chances," growled Backus.

"No chance of explosives being already placed in the tower, is there?" I inquired. "I mean a bomb of some kind that could be set off by electricity?"

"I've gone over it with a fine tooth comb."

Slocum snarled like an angry terrier. In fact, he reminded me for all the world of a white-haired, snapping, little spitz. "I'll tell you it's foolishness to pay any more attention to these communications! All foolishness, I say! Let's get down to business. Grimes has allowed the thing to get on his nerves. He forgets that he, like myself, is getting along towards his dotage. Ten years ago he would have thrown them into the waste basket. I'll not vote to

pay the expenses of getting this detective here. Not a cent! Not a single copper! If Grimes wants him, he can have him—and pay him, too.”

There was a general nodding of heads around the table. Decidedly the atmosphere into which I had stepped at the request of President Grimes was inclined to be frigid, to say the least—if not openly hostile.

Innis, diplomatic and suave, arose with an apologetic smile to pour oil on the troubled waters. “Mr. Grimes is probably justified in his worry, in that he feels a sense of responsibility, as president and general manager, in protecting the company’s interests. On the other hand we, as directors, should vote to give him a clearance if anything happens—and we are all of us confident that nothing will.”

President Grimes shrugged his shoulders and turned to me as if to ask my advice.

“I would suggest that you hold off your decision for a few seconds,” I answered to his implied question. “If your mysterious blackmailer is as prompt as he claims to be we will have but a short time to wait developments. In just thirty seconds it will be twelve o’clock.”

Instantly the gathering was hushed. The smile died on Innis’ lips. Slocum looked up, his lips skinned back angrily, then thought better of it and merely stared at Backus, who shifted his big frame uneasily in his chair. Grimes straightened up with a jerk and gazed into vacancy. There was a general scraping of feet and a nervous clearing of throats.

Despite the tension, I could scarcely suppress a smile at the appearance of one of the directors, James Burke, a young man with a pale, sallow face and an habitually apologetic manner. He half arose to his feet, as if almost startled out of his wits, then sat down

again hurriedly and wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead. I noticed that his hand shook like an aspen leaf, and he snickered hysterically. Clearly, his was the clearest case of funk I had ever witnessed.

The factory whistle blew!

A dull, muffled explosion! Then chaos!

CHAPTER II

I AWOKE with a start. For a second I lay quiet, my mind attempting to grope back over what had happened, unable to comprehend. Outside I could hear shouts, the clanging of bells, the sound of footsteps on the stairs leading to the office. My head ached dully, but I was otherwise uninjured. The big table, overturned, lay across my legs. Pushing it off, I raised myself to a sitting position. For an instant my brain whirled and everything grew black before me. Then the dizziness and feeling of nausea passed away and I was able to comprehend what was happening around me.

Plaster from the ceiling and walls covered everything; the air was filled with its thin, white dust. The pungent odor of explosives assailed my nostrils.

Chairs were overturned. Books and papers lay scattered about the floor.

Beside me lay Grimes, breathing heavily. Innis and Slocum were huddled together across the room, the latter bleeding from a small cut on the forehead. In one corner Burke, the man I had marked as a coward, was sitting up sobbing crooningly to himself,—the victim of hysteria, evidently. The other members of the board sprawled here and there in various attitudes. Backus raised himself to one elbow and gazed about stupidly.

The door was burst open with a crash and the room filled with rescuers—factory workmen, their black, smudgy

faces expressing their wonderment. I pulled myself clear of the table and started mechanically, to look after Grimes and those who seemed most in need of attention.

With the bellow of a maddened bull, Backus drew himself to his feet and, elbowing his way through the throng about the door, throwing men to right and left as he charged, rushed up the damaged stairway leading to the tower above.

A physician emerged from somewhere. But, by the time of his arrival, his services were in little demand. For practically all of those who had been in the room at the time of the explosion were on their feet assuring each other of their safety. Aside from plastering up the cut in old man Slocum's head, there was little for him to do. Even the officer at the foot of the stairway leading to the tower had escaped uninjured, although the tower itself was a wreck.

* * * * *

A girl—even to my dirt filled eyes, a vision of loveliness in a cool, white chiffon—struggled through the crowd of men in the outside hallway and threw her arms around the aged president.

"Are you hurt? Are you injured, Uncle Grimes?" she demanded, sobbingly.

The little man patted the girl's shoulder.

"Not by a darned sight," he chuckled. "It was worth the bump I got to prove to Slocum that I'm not such a darned old fool as he claims I am. Now dry your eyes and meet Mr. Larson—Captain Larson, my niece Joan—Miss Marne, I should say."

He turned to the assembled directors with a beatific smile on his wrinkled face.

"Gentlemen," he said gravely, although there was a twinkle in his eyes, "I hereby declare this meeting ad-

journed until ten o'clock tomorrow morning, at which time we will continue our discussion of our friend, 'The Man in the Black Mask.' Larson, you will be my guest while in town, of course?"

With a few terse orders to the superintendent as to the repairs in and about the office, he followed his niece and myself to the waiting automobile below, chuckling like a youngster at Slocum's discomfiture.

CHAPTER III

I SAT at the luncheon table and gazed across the wide expanse of cloth at the girl. She was an enigma—a female puzzle—a woman, as could easily be seen, unhampered by society's conventions, unaffected, yet every bit a woman. She was a beauty—yes, a beauty judged by any kind of rule. Yet there was something odd, strange, peculiar, about her—an elusive *something* that I could not comprehend. She reminded me of a person laboring under a sorrow which she was struggling to keep hidden from the world. She ate little to speak of, seeming preoccupied, and resisting my best efforts to carry on even a casual conversation.

Grimes, on the other hand, was extraordinarily cheerful, caring more, to all appearances, for his victory over Slocum than for the property loss the company had suffered.

Mrs. Casey, the invalid, plainly a neurotic—excitable and prone to hysteria—said little, excusing herself before the end of the meal was reached, pleading a bad case of nerves as a result of the trouble at the factory.

Luncheon over, Grimes, with all the chippiness of a youngster of twenty, declared that he intended motoring back to the factory to look things over. Naturally, I was to accompany him.

Miss Marne aroused herself from her lethargy and insisted on going with us.

She excused herself and, before we had completed our cigars, she danced into the room again attired in a natty motor-ing costume, her abstraction gone and gay as a butterfly, taking the wheel her-self. I took the front seat with her while Grimes lolled in the rear.

* * * * *

Workmen had already completed the job of cleaning away the debris in the office. A truck load of gravel and a pile of bricks gave evidence that, despite the threats of the mysterious blackmailer to destroy the entire plant, it was Grimes's intention to rush repairs as rapidly as possible.

As we climbed out of the machine, Backus, who had been standing in the background, his round, red face wearing a puzzled expression, stepped forward and greeted us.

"Find anything new, Chief?" Grimes demanded.

The big man looked about him cau-tiously, then motioning us to one side, produced from his pocket a small, thin, slightly bent piece of metal.

He handed it to the little president without a word. Grimes looked at it with a puzzled expression, then passed it on to me.

"I'm danged if I know what it is," he admitted. "How about you, Lar-son?"

I gave the bit of metal a cursory ex-amination then handed it to Joan.

"I think that the Chief has struck oil the first shot," I replied. "In other words, that same piece of metal is a bit of the shell that kicked down your tower. Where did you find it, Chief?"

"In the upper room just over the of-fice," replied the officer. "It wasn't there this morning, for I made a per-sonal inspection and locked the door my-self before stationing Mitchell at the foot of the stairs."

"Shell?" jerked Grimes. "Non-sense!"

"Nevertheless," I reiterated, "your tower was blown up with some kind of a shell. You can't get away from the evidence."

Backus wagged his head sagely as he replaced the metal in his pocket. I had already won him for a friend, I could readily see.

"All right, we'll admit it's a shell, then, for the sake of argument," Grimes responded. "That doesn't put us any closer to the solution of the puzzle."

"On the contrary," I interrupted, "it does. It stands to reason, as any one who is acquainted with explosives will tell you, that the shell was of small cali-bre and filled with but very little high explosive, else the damage would have been greater. It was fired from some-where, and by somebody, and from some sort of gun. Result: We have but to find where the shell came from and we have your 'Man in the Black Mask' by the heels."

"As well look for a needle in a hay-stack. My opinion is that some sort of explosive was planted in the tower in spite of the chief's precautions, and de-tonated by electricity—possibly by wire-less. I've heard of such things. Don't you think that more probable than the idea you and Backus have of some won-derful gun and still more wonderful marksman?"

"Not at all. Although my experience at the front taught me that, despite the high point of efficiency reached by the gunners, a direct hit is only scored acci-dentally—unless the range is almost point blank. I'll venture the assertion that the gun from which that shell was fired is located not over two miles away. In fact, a mile would be a closer guess."

Backus agreed with me. For despite the fact that he was only a small town policeman, he was no fool.

The wizened president grinned sardonically.

"You'll be telling me next that you can point out the place," he laughed.

"I'm almost tempted to say that I can." I looked around me for a second, then inquired. "By the way, where does this creek lead from?"

Backus leaned forward excitedly.

"By ginger!" he ejaculated. "You've hit it. They shot down the creek. They are located in the hills south of town. It's me to investigate."

"On the contrary," I returned, "you'll do nothing of the sort, Chief. You're too well known. I am a stranger here and my face is unfamiliar, probably, even to the leader of the mysterious band. Let me look over the ground first. I am likely to see things that might be hidden from you. It's my business to search for the hidden things."

"But it's my place—"

"Larson's right," interrupted Grimes. "A stranger is much more likely to succeed than a person so well known as yourself."

"But—"

I clapped the big officer on the shoulder. "I know just how you feel, Chief. But I'll promise to make no move until I've informed you—that is if I find anything suspicious. You can make the arrests and get the credit."

"All right and good luck," he answered. "Meanwhile, I'll scout around here and see what else I can pick up. I suppose that you'll start right away?"

"This very minute."

"Just a second," Grimes exclaimed. "For all we know, there may be spies lurking about. Why not let Joan and me drive you back to the house. From there you can skirt the hill in a south-westerly direction and come down the creek instead of going up. Such a move will divert suspicion."

"You're right," I answered, while the chief nodded a grudging assent. "Let us get busy at once—that is if you are through here, Mr. Grimes."

The little president proved himself a man of action by calling to Joan and hastily climbing back into the machine. Ten minutes later we were at home.

"Do you start immediately?" inquired Joan, who, up to this time had taken no part in the conversation, although she had been an interested listener.

"As soon as I have secured my revolver from my grip."

She accompanied me into the house, Grimes preferring to wait on the veranda, stating that he would go with me a short distance to show me the general lay of the land.

As we reached the seclusion of the hallway, Joan turned to me, a look of worry on her sweet face.

"Please don't go," she whispered, lowering her voice purposely to keep her uncle from hearing.

I was astonished both by her tone and the words.

"I don't understand." I returned.

She seemed at a loss for words.

"I—I have a feeling that you will get into trouble," she finally replied, laying her hand on my arm.

I laughed. "I've been doing that all my life. The worst I ever got was a dose of tear gas, overseas. Haven't you got any better reason than that?"

"Only a woman's intuition—a woman's reason," she smiled. "In other words, I don't want you to go—*because*. That's all I can tell you—*because*!"

"I'm afraid that it will have to be a better reason than that to keep me from going," I laughed. "Your uncle hired me to run this thing down. I'm drawing a salary from him and the quicker I earn my salt the better."

She shrugged her shoulders prettily,

as if dismissing the subject and turned aside into her own apartment.

CHAPTER IV

To change my attire for a garb more suited to walking over the rough ground and to look over the service revolver, which had been packed away in my valise, did not occupy five minutes.

Yet, as I stepped out into the hallway, I saw pinned against the panel of my door a typewritten note. It read:

"Cut out your investigation or you will get into trouble. Too many people are involved in this affair for us to take chances—so keep out of it. A word to the wise is—or should be—sufficient.

"THE MAN IN THE BLACK MASK."

Hastily thrusting the missive into my pocket, I hurried down the stairway, looking in every direction for possible spies.

No one was in sight. Yet it was clear that someone inside the house had written that warning—and that the writer was in league with the man who was threatening the factory—or was "The Man in the Black Mask" himself. Only three people besides myself knew of my contemplated plan of action—Backus, Grimes, and Joan. Backus was eliminated by the fact that he was still at the scene of the explosion. This left but two who were in the secret, Joan and her uncle. Was it possible that one of them was the traitor? The idea startled me. It seemed absurd—yet one finds some strange things when investigating crime.

From the big living room, the door of which was partly open, came the click of a typewriter. I halted momentarily and looked in. Joan was at work at the machine. She looked up and smiled as she saw me. I imagined, however, that

there was a slight flush upon her cheeks and that she did not look me squarely in the eyes.

"Just practicing," she responded in reply to my question. "Uncle often lets me write his letters for him here at home."

She invited me to enter. But I excused myself, pleading haste, and joined Grimes outside.

My head was whirling. For the momentary halt had given me time enough to discover that the ribbon on the machine she was using was a peculiar shade of green. The note of warning I had received had been written with a green ribbon.

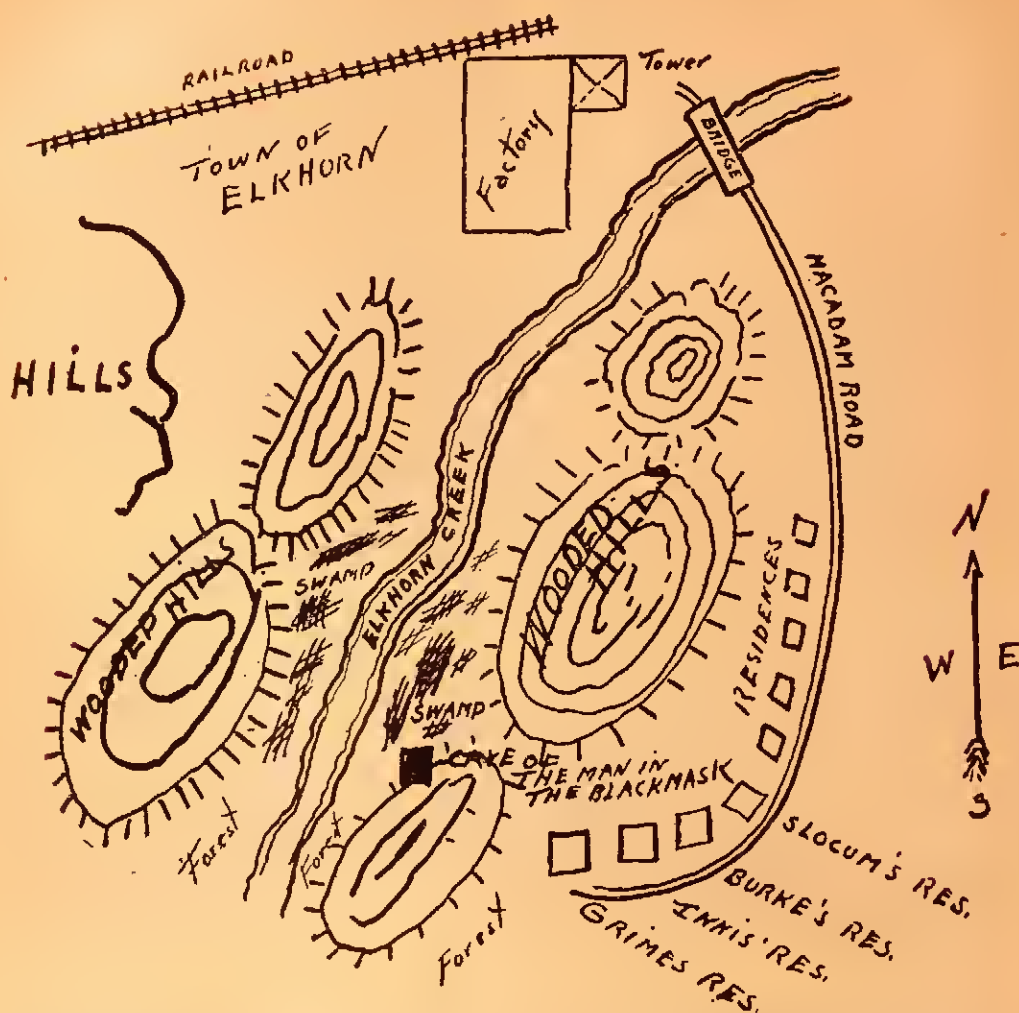
But that was not all: Lying on the floor beside her—where it had evidently fallen—was half of a sheet of note paper. *And the other half, unless my eyes deceived me, was reposing in the pocket of my coat.*

Was Joan Marne the mysterious "Man in the Black Mask?" It seemed impossible — far-fetched—unthinkable. Yet there were half a dozen clues leading in her direction. And her actions in attempting to dissuade me from going into the matter any farther damned her. I hated to believe the evidence. Yet it was piling up against her.

CHAPTER V

To avoid needless description, and at the same time give the reader a rough outline of the general lay of the land so that he may better understand the events which follow, a rough map of Elkhorn and vicinity is printed on the next page.

As will be seen by this sketch, practically all of the wealthier residents of Elkhorn, most of whom were directors and stockholders in the chemical company, resided along this country road where the contour of the land gave them better opportunities for spacious grounds and broad lawns than did the



little town itself, huddled as it was between the hills. Grimes' home was at the extreme south end of the road which ran from the factory around the hills.

Grimes, as excited as a youngster, left me at the edge of the little forest southwest of his residence after giving concise directions regarding the best method of skirting the hill to the right and reaching the creek. He pleaded to be allowed to accompany me, but his common sense led him to agree with me that he, like Backus, was too well known. And, too, I wanted to be alone—to diagnose the affair in my own

mind. Joan appealed to me as no woman had ever appealed before, yet I could not drive the idea from me that every step I took was tightening the coils about her. For the first time in my career as a man-hunter my sympathies were all with the criminal.

Under ordinary circumstances the natural thing for me to do would have been to follow the right bank of the creek from the base of the hill. Instead, however, finding my view of the factory obstructed by the small growth of trees between the base of the hill and the creek, and imagining that I could secure a clearer view from the opposite

bank, I tested the depth of the water and finding that it appeared shallow, sat down and removed my shoes and stockings. Then, turning up my trousers to the knees, I forded the stream and on the opposite bank put my shoes, etc., on again, taking up my search from that side.

It was approximately two o'clock when I left Grimes at the edge of the forest and nearly two hours later when I found myself in the gully between the two hills just opposite the swamp in the rear of the little president's residence.

Deciding that I had gone far enough in a northeasterly direction and finding nothing of a suspicious nature on the left bank of the creek, I quickly forded the stream again and set off along the right bank, intending to skirt the swamp, returning to the house in time to dress for dinner.

Suddenly, I noticed a suspicious movement in a clump of bushes near the edge of the wooded hill. I stopped short, then dropped on hands and knees, intending to creep forward and investigate.

As I did so, a report came from the brush and a bullet whistled past my head. Had I been a tenth of a second later, my life would probably have paid the penalty.

I am not a coward by any means. But neither am I inclined to be foolhardy. I dislike to take human life, but I was forced to defend myself. I replied to the attack by pumping half a clip of shots into the clump from which the bullet had come, at the same time dodging behind a convenient tree.

I remained for probably ten minutes, keeping a sharp lookout for my antagonist. Then, hearing nothing more, I cautiously skirted the bushes, approaching them from behind.

My mysterious assailant had flown. I found the spot from where he had fired, however, as an empty cartridge testi-

fied, while the grass was tramped flat where he had been lying.

Close by, where it had been dropped in his flight, was a handkerchief scented with lavender. In the corner was embroidered the letter "I."

Innis, the diplomatic attorney, who had objected so strenuously, though courteously, to my retention as an investigator, had, I had noticed at the morning's meeting, kept his handkerchief strongly scented with lavender—an odor which is extremely repugnant to me—so repugnant that I had noted it particularly.

CHAPTER VI

HERE was a puzzle. Why should Innis—for I now felt certain that it had been the lawyer who had fired upon me—object so strongly to my presence that he felt it necessary to murder me in order to put me out of the way? Could he be the mysterious masked man? It did not seem probable. And, yet, I had suspected Joan Marne with no more evidence against her—in fact, not as much—as I had against the lawyer. It pleased me to think that the trail was leading in another direction. Anybody but Joan, I felt.

Evidently the note pinned to my door had told the truth. There were "too many people mixed up in the case" to take any chances. The band led by the masked mystery would not stop even at murder in order to carry out their ends.

Clearly, it was up to me to move cautiously. There was something decidedly "rotten in Denmark." Something was going on of which the little president was not informed. The affair, rather than being as simple as I had at first believed, was rapidly assuming complications of gigantic proportions. Every time I turned around I bumped into some new piece of evidence. There was

too much of it. Was it being "planted" in order to confuse me? Or, as I was rapidly beginning to believe, were more people—and people of prominence—involved than appeared on the surface?

My brain whirling, I started off in the direction of the house, intending to place my suspicions squarely before Grimes and find out, before going any farther into the case, just what he knew and what he suspected—for I was growing of the opinion that he suspected something strongly against some one when he took sides squarely against his directors, even to the extent of paying all bills himself.

I had proceeded scarcely a hundred yards when a peculiar threshing about in a thicket of coarse swamp grass attracted my attention.

Drawing my revolver as a matter of precaution—for my previous experience had taught me a lesson—I crept forward until I could almost touch the confused tangle with my hand.

A crumpled heap of blue lay face downward. I sprang forward and bent over the man.

It was Backus.

"Chief!" I cried.

A groan answered me. As easily as I could I turned the big policeman over and, tearing open his coat and shirt, found a tiny, black hole through the chest close to the heart from which the crimson was slowly gushing. He was dying. That I could see at half a glance.

"Who shot you?" I demanded.

Backus opened his eyes weakly. He attempted to raise his arm as if to point. The effort caused a paroxysm of coughing. Yet, game to the last, he tried to tell me his story.

"Got—idea," he muttered. "Followed—creek—met 'Man in—Black—Mask'—it was—"

His voice ended in a gurgle and he fell back in my arms—dead.

CHAPTER VII

"STICK up your hands—and do it quick!"

I turned quickly—my hands moving heavenward—to gaze into the muzzle of a vicious-looking automatic in the hands of a dapper—almost dainty—little man attired in overalls, his face covered entirely by a mask of dark gauze. Through two slits his eyes gleamed dangerously. A large felt hat covered his head; beneath it peeped a fringe of light-brown hair. Plainly the entire makeup was a disguise.

Before I had time to make more than a cursory survey, however, the masked man spoke again.

"There is a revolver in your right hip pocket. I saw you put it there when you bent over Backus. Turn your back to me, keep your left hand in the air and remove the gun with your right. Move lively."

I did as ordered.

"Now throw the gun into the creek. Quick!"

With a light splash the weapon struck the water a dozen paces away.

"Now turn to your left and go ahead—and keep your hands up!"

A walk of possibly a hundred yards brought us to the edge of the swamp. In response to my captor's curt command I again swung to the left, and, a moment later, found myself staring into the mouth of a cave, the opening being, however, but little larger than an ordinary door. I passed through the gloomy entrance into the darkened interior, my captor following close behind. There was a sharp click and a huge stone slid almost noiselessly across the opening, closing it completely.

It was as neat a piece of camouflage as I have ever gazed upon—and I viewed the work of the best artists in the world, overseas. In fact, so cleverly was the hillside disguised that one might



Recognizing the man in the mask, he stopped short and allowed the weapon to slide slowly through his fingers until the butt rested on the floor—Page 14

pass within a dozen feet of the opening and, unless he knew the secret, never observe it. Even portholes were cut in the rock, blocked by heavy pieces of stone cut to fit, and removable from the inside, yet so covered as to be indistinguishable to the passerby. I am confident that, had occasion demanded, the fortress—for a fortress was really what it was—would have withstood any ordinary assault except the fire of heavy guns.

Another click, and the cavern was a blaze of light from a dozen or more electric bulbs suspended from the ceiling. The floor was of clean, white sand, while the walls, as my later observation showed, were of the peculiar sandstone out of which the cave was hewed.

A dark-faced man, asleep on an army cot in a distant corner, leaped to his feet, rubbing his eyes. From around a projection in one of the walls stepped a rough-looking fellow armed with a modern rifle. Recognizing the man in the mask, he stopped short and allowed the weapon to slide slowly through his fingers until the butt rested on the floor, gazing at me quizzically.

"This the chap who was doing the snooping around, guv'nor?" he inquired.

"One of them," snapped the masked man. "The other is—lying outside in the gully."

"Did you kill him?"

The leader snarled like an angry dog. "It's none of your business! You ought to know by this time, Snell, that when people interfere with me, they get into trouble. Get me?"

"S'all right. S'all right, guv'nor. You're boss. Only when you took us on you said there would be no killing in the job."

With a shrug of his shoulders, he stepped back a pace and sat down in one of the camp-chairs which were scattered about the cavern.

The masked man replaced his weapon in his pocket and turned to me with an almost feminine gesture towards one of the chairs at the nearby table.

"Captain Larson," he said easily, "sit down and let's talk matters over. Will you have a cigar?"

He passed a box of perfectos from a nearby table. I selected one to my liking, the masked man declining, however, as I returned the box to him.

"Hang it, Captain!" he exclaimed. "It does me good to see you take matters so nicely. You and I are going to get along famously. It would be a pleasure to work with a man like you—but of course, as you realize, that is an impossibility. You are worth money to me—all kinds of it. Grimes and his bunch ought to be willing to put up at least ten thousand ransom for you. Meanwhile, will you give me your parole—your liberty inside the cave with certain restrictions—or won't you?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"What's the alternative?" I asked.

"Your ankle chained to the wall."

"But how do you know that I'll keep my parole?"

Another chuckle from behind the mask. "I know you by reputation. You are a man of your word. Give it to me and I know you'll keep it. Honestly, I hate to think of chaining you up like a wild beast—but you understand it's necessary—under certain conditions. What's your decision?"

"I accept. I'll give you my word to make no attempt to escape. I reserve the right, however, to change my decision at any time by notifying you. May I ask questions?"

"As many as you like and about what you like. I won't promise to answer them all, though!"

"Who are you?"

An almost silvery laugh came from behind the mask. "Who I am cuts no

figure," he responded. "What I am is different. I am a man with a mission. That mission is to extract money from the rich."

"I. W. W. or Bolshevik?"

"The Man in the Black Mask" chuckled again. "Neither. I have gathered this little band about me to carry out my ideals. After all necessary expenses are paid, the remainder of the money which I extort from the rich will be divided among the poor. Later, I will move on to some new field of endeavor. There you have the story in a nutshell. You will probably call me insane. I am not. I am an idealist."

"But this cave?"

"Merely a part of the workings of an old stone quarry. I discovered it quite by accident. It is large and roomy and has been made thoroughly comfortable for my men and myself. I light it by tapping one of the wires leading from the power plant. The power company is rich and will never miss the electricity I use. We depend on it for cooking, also. The smoke from a fire might betray us, you know!"

"I surmise that you used some sort of silencer when you fired upon the tower?"

"Merely an enlargement of the Maxim attached to a one pounder. I got the gun here by express, in parts, as I did all of my other equipment. We are prepared to withstand almost any ordinary attack, for we have several machine guns and a large quantity of ammunition. Food we have in plenty. There is a spring of fresh water bubbling out of the ground at the other end of the cave.

"My men are all experts. Although I must confess that Pedro, my gunner—he was trained in the Italian army and is an artist in his line—miscalculated slightly and hit the tower a trifle too low. Really, it was inexcusable, for he had the range down to inches."

He arose and stretched himself. "I

must leave you now, Captain. I trust there is no necessity for reminding you again of your parole?"

"May I ask one more question?"

"Certainly."

"You spoke of holding me for ransom. Suppose we—that is, my friends and myself—decide to pay immediately? Will I then be released or held here?"

"You will be kept here, until our plans are matured whether you pay now or later."

"And in case we refuse?"

There was no hesitation on the part of the man as he replied in a voice of icy coldness:

"Let us not talk of unpleasant things. You will be killed—murdered in cold blood—as a warning that it is not wise to fight 'The Man in the Black Mask!'"

He turned upon his heel and disappeared around a corner of the wall.

CHAPTER VIII

As "The Man in the Black Mask" left me, I sat down and took an inventory of the affair as it stood up to date. As a first-class detective I had proven myself a success—with a vengeance. Speaking from the standpoint of a military strategist I had attained my objective. But the devil of it was that I couldn't let loose of it, now that I had it.

I had succeeded in running the mysterious blackmailer to his lair and he had proved to be a boomerang, for the probabilities were extremely strong that I would remain there for considerable time after he had departed. For there was little likelihood that the board of directors would put up any large ransom to get me out of the hole into which I had succeeded in burying myself. I might succeed in raising the amount myself were I at liberty, but in my present circumstances things looked hopeless.

Was I wrong in having given my

parole, and thus preventing myself from attempting to escape? Of course, I could always retract it, but there was a cold manner about the masked leader which led me to believe that he would not hesitate a second in carrying out his threat to chain me to the wall the minute I did so. And, chained to the wall, I would be worse off than I now was. On the other hand, I might break my word, of course—but even detectives respect their honor, and I have always found that, in the long run, it pays to be square, even with criminals.

I was aroused from my reverie by the re-entrance of the object of my thoughts. He held aside the curtain which covered the entrance to the rear of the cave through which he had gone shortly before, and gazed at me for a second, his eyes burning brightly through the holes in his mask.

"Did I, or did I not, warn you not to come past this spot?" he asked.

I shook my head in the negative.

"Then let me do so now. This blanket marks the entrance to the exit of the cave proper. It is what was formerly one of the tunnels leading off from the quarry. Scattered here and there, along its length are deep—almost bottomless—water-filled pits into which you might stumble in the darkness. A fall into one of them would mean your death. Aside from that, I do not wish to have you prying about. There are things I do not care to have you see. You understand?"

I was about to make reply, but evidently taking my silence as consent, with another curt nod, he turned on his heel and again disappeared down the passageway.

As he turned, I heard a faint tinkle, and a small object fell to the floor of the cave, unobserved. I waited until I could no longer hear his footfalls on

the sandy floor, then I sprang to my feet and picked it up.

It was a hairpin!

There was no longer any doubt in my mind as to the identity of "The Man in the Black Mask." The hairpin was conclusive evidence that it was Joan Marne. I hated to believe it, but the facts were indisputable.

I have never considered myself a woman-hater nor a susceptible ladies' man. I have known them of all races and breeds, but never had one impressed me almost as one of their own number. her position—to think that she had some good reason for her strange conduct—only to have the face of the dying Backus flash before my eyes. She had killed him—shot him in cold blood—and gloated over it afterwards. No, try as I would I could not find a single circumstance in her favor.

I was loath to admit it, but I was falling in love. I, a man-hunter, was in love with a murderess! Cursing myself, the hairpin, the infernal mixup—yes, even Joan—I hunted up my jailors and spent the remainder of the afternoon in their company, trying to forget.

CHAPTER IX

SUPPER was served in a little niche off from the main cave. There were six men in the party, not counting myself, one serving as cook, "The Man in the Black Mask" not making his appearance. On only one or two occasions had he ever dined with his men, they informed me, although he insisted that they be served with the best.

During his absence, the members of his party were not at all reluctant in discussing him or his affairs, treating me, almost, as one of their own number. None of them, it appeared, had ever viewed his face. He had gathered them almost from the ends of the earth, picking one up here, another there—always

working through a proxy—each selected because of his particular fitness for the job.

Pedro, for instance, had studied gunnery for years. Johnson was a machine gunner. Travis and Snell were both experts with the rifle. McGinnis was Pedro's assistant and a gunner of extraordinary ability himself, while Jenkins, the negro chef, was known, so he informed me, from one end of the country to the other as the best cook in the American Expeditionary Forces.

All were men from the lower walks of life—crooks, probably, thugs, gunmen—yet, strange as it may seem, proud of their records as soldiers. They had made good in the army, then, discipline relaxed, they had again fallen into their evil ways. The pay was good, the food was excellent and, to a certain extent, they were satisfied—especially with the prospect of a fight in sight—but still they grumbled.

They had arrived only a few weeks before, coming to Elkhorn in the guise of laborers. They had been met at the station by an unknown man, disguised, they believed, who had directed them where to go to find the entrance to the cave. Here they met "The Man in the Black Mask" and received their instructions which consisted simply in obeying orders and remaining inside of the cave day and night. To date they had absolutely nothing to do except eat and sleep and take turns on guard, with the exception of firing the one shell which had wrecked the tower.

Already, however, the work was proving irksome and, like all active men cooped up for a considerable period of time, they growled considerably, a fact which I believed, when the time was ripe, I could turn to good account, for I was far from being ready to tamely abide by the mysterious leader's mandate that I must either buy my liberty or calmly submit to being butchered as a

warning to others. There was nothing in my parole which prohibited my stirring up an agitation; I decided to take the bull by the horns and create an internal strife as soon as opportunity offered itself. By starting a mutiny I might escape with a whole skin.

Shortly after supper, Travis, who was better educated than the rest, and who appeared to be the natural leader during the absence of the masked chieftain, took me on a tour of inspection of their retreat.

The cave proper was a huge affair, hewn out of the solid sandstone, possibly five hundred feet in length by half as wide. The main cavern was brilliantly lighted. Opening off from it were innumerable tunnels and pockets where the light was a dim twilight, shading off into blackest darkness—shadowy, dismal—an altogether fitting refuge for a modern buccaneer. One of the latter was illuminated and used as a barracks, another as a kitchen, and a third, larger than the others, as a storehouse. Judging from the numerous boxes piled in the interior, the masked leader evidently expected his occupancy to be a long one.

Where their mysterious chieftain kept himself none of them knew. It was their belief, however, that he had more men stationed in some of the other tunnels and that he was planning a gigantic coup of some kind—possibly a revolution—sooner or later, and, for this reason, prohibited their entering the other outlets to avoid having the various parties meet and compare notes. He appeared only at intervals, coming without warning and often disappearing for a day or two at a time. They were paid, however, not to ask questions and asked none, although they were perfectly willing to answer anything that I might ask and were willing to speculate as much as myself as to the identity of their mysterious leader.

Our trip of inspection over, Travis and I returned to the others, when suddenly the curtain which marked the entrance to the tunnel used by the masked man parted and he appeared before us. He nodded curtly to me and asked me to step aside for a second.

"Larson," he said jerkily—almost nervously I thought—"they have discovered Backus' body and are raising the devil. Things are getting more complicated all the time. What are we going to do?"

"Indeed," I smiled. "You hardly thought that as big a thing as the murder of the chief of police would pass unnoticed, did you? You should have realized that before you killed him!"

He nodded his head grimly.

"It's awful—awful!" he muttered. Then he stopped suddenly.

"I forgot," he murmured. "You are in no position to give advice, nor I to ask it. I must work out my own salvation—mine and—"

He was about to turn away, hesitated, then again addressed me.

"Larson," he said, "you can believe me or not—probably you won't—but I did not kill Backus, nor was I present when he met his death. Would to God I had been, and I might have prevented it."

His agitation, as well as his words, puzzled me. I noticed that his hand was shaking as he reached out mechanically and selected a cigar from the box which stood on the table. Striking a match, he applied the flame to the end. As he did so, I made a discovery which almost brought me to my feet with a jerk.

By the light of the match I noticed a small scar in the palm of his hand.

That morning I had noticed a similar scar on the palm of John Grimes, president of the Elkhorn Chemical Company!

"The Man in the Black Mask" was

not Joan Marne, but her uncle John Grimes, the man who had hired me, was the traitor who had betrayed his colleagues—the murderer of Henry Backus!

But was he?

A short time before he had declined a cigar with the statement that he did not smoke. Now he was smoking. And what about the hairpin I had found? The case had me baffled. It was growing more complex every minute. Who was "The Man in the Black Mask?"

CHAPTER X

I SPENT an uneventful night with my guards, Travis, who, as I have said, seemed to be in charge, taking me at my word and paying no attention to me except to assign me to a bunk.

A guard, however, was posted, not on my account, but, as my jailor informed me, at the orders of "The Man in the Black Mask," who had insisted that a sentinel be maintained at all hours of the day and night to ward against a possible surprise. This routine had been maintained ever since they had occupied the cave.

I slept little during the early part of the night, however. There was constantly revolving through my mind the question of who the mysterious leader was—if he was a man. There was enough evidence against Innis, Grimes and Joan to have convicted any one of them before an average jury. That was the trouble—there was too much evidence.

The more I studied over the situation, the more I was convinced that there was a flaw in my reasoning somewhere. One of the three was guilty. But which?

Finally, I dropped off into a troubled sleep, the last thing I was conscious of being a vague remembrance of an argu-

ment between McGinnis and Snell over the game of whist in which they were engaged.

I awakened with a start. Travis was shaking me. As I opened my eyes, he studied my face for a second, then turned away.

"It's a cinch that you ain't faking," he remarked.

"Faking? What do you mean?" I asked.

"Sleep," he replied laconically. "McGinnis disappeared while he was on guard and the old man's going to be raising merry hell before long. Thought maybe you had a hand in it—might have taken advantage of my decency to you and done for him during the night."

"I'll swear that I haven't left my bunk since I went to bed," I exclaimed.

I was about to continue my explanations when I was interrupted by a shout from the other end of the cavern. Travis hurried away on the run. Slipping into my trousers and shoes, I followed as speedily as I could.

As I turned the corner and entered the main cavern, I met Jenkins. The big negro's face was ashen. He was trembling like a man with the ague.

"They found him!" he exclaimed. "Lordy! Lordy! He's awful! The big boss am certainly g'wine to raise the debbil!"

"Where did they find him?" I asked.

"In the main cavern, deader'n a herring—all chopped to pieces!" And still wailing, he hurried back to the pots and pans of his kitchen.

As I approached the little group under the electric light, "The Man in the Black Mask" looked up at me.

"Bad work, here, Larson, bad work!" he exclaimed. "I am safe in presuming that you had no hand in it, am I not?"

"Do I look or act like a murderer?" I demanded, angrily. "If you think I'm

up to such tricks, why don't you lock me up?"

He was about to reply when Travis leaped into the gap. "I'll vouch for Larson, governor," he answered. "He was sleeping like a baby when I woke him up this morning."

The masked man turned upon Snell. "What's this I hear about bad blood between you and McGinnis last night?" he snapped.

"'S' true, gov'nor, 's'true," answered the gunman. "We made it up, though, and parted good friends. God Almighty! I wouldn't croak a pal, even if I did have a chewin' match with him."

"Thata right," interposed Pedro. "I watcha da scrap. They forgeta their troubles an quita friends. McGinnis, he sleepa wit' me. Getta up and go ona guard when Travis wakea him. Travis, he comea t' bed. All th' while Snell, he sleepa sound."

I stooped over and examined the dead man. It was as Jenkins had said. He had been literally hacked to pieces. Even his hands and face had been cut and slashed in a hundred places. His murder was not the work of an ordinary man, but a fiend—a maniac.

The masked leader scratched his cheek perplexedly. "It's a hell of a mess, Larson—a hell of a mess! Oh, if I only dared take you into my confidence! If I only dared!"

As he made the gesture, my glance involuntarily strayed to his hand. On the palm was the peculiar scar I had noticed the night before. There was no longer any doubt in my mind. The masked chieftain of the blackmailing crew was John Grimes.

Joan and the attorney were exonerated.

CHAPTER XI

IN order to give the reader a more complete understanding of the strange

events with which I had to deal, allow me to digress for an instant and quote from my diary, which was written at the time, and in which I jotted down each item as it occurred in order to refresh my memory in case I ever managed to escape and the matter ever came to trial:

"'The Man in the Black Mask' becomes a more and more perplexing character to me every hour," I wrote. "I am certain that he is Grimes. And I am growing of the opinion, the longer I observe him, that the weazened president of the Elkhorn Chemical Company is a veritable *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde!*

"I cannot understand him. For instance, this morning when I first observed him standing beside the body of McGinnis, he appeared nervous and overwrought. His walk was that of an old man. While I was kneeling down examining the body, he disappeared into one of the dark, gloomy tunnels, muttering to himself.

"Whether he is a drug addict or not is a question. I only know that when he reappeared some fifteen or twenty minutes later he was a new man in actions and appearance. His step was elastic and his whole manner again that of the natural leader. His eyes sparkled like coals of fire through the slits in his mask. And, strange to relate, he appeared to have forgotten the entire incident.

"Stepping up to where we were standing about the body, he looked down at the battered remnant of what had been McGinnis and demanded gruffly of Travis.

"Well, what the hell's happened now?"

"Travis looked at him queerly, then, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, informed him that there had been nothing of interest transpired since he left.

"Since I left?" he snarled. 'Hell's

bells! I haven't been here before! Explain yourself. Don't stand there and try to make a monkey out of me.'

"Naturally Travis, as well as the rest of us, was somewhat perplexed. For a second he attempted to argue with his leader, but met with another angry rebuff. Seeing that he was getting nowhere, he finally shut up like a clam, refusing to say another word in spite of the other's abuse. I could see, too, that the others were growing angry at the masked leader's churlishness towards their comrade, for Travis was popular with all. Finally, however, in response to his chief's demand, he went over the entire matter again.

"When Travis had finished his tale, the masked man ordered the mutilated body prepared for burial, giving his loud-voiced commands in so callous a manner that even the case-hardened renegades under his command—thugs and dregs of humanity though they are—were shocked.

"We'll 'plant' him outside after dark tonight," he ended. 'He was no good, anyway.'

"Then, giving a number of sharp orders to his piratical crew, he asked me to walk a short distance down the cave with him.

"Have you got any theories as to who might have killed him?" he demanded. 'You're a detective and chanced to be on the ground, as it were, at the time of the killing. Show me that you're worth your salt. Deliver the murderer to me and I'll reduce your ransom a thousand. I'd like to see one of you high-priced detectives at work!'

"I shook my head, and with a sneering remark regarding my ability, he turned the subject by informing me that the body of Backus had been taken away and, 'hell was to pay.'

"It'll teach them that I'm not the sort of man to be played with," he chuckled. 'Tomorrow I'll give them another sur-

prise when Pedro knocks a second chunk off the factory with his one pounder. Perhaps by that time they will awake to the fact that I mean business. If they don't kick in, I'll knock the devil out of things the next time.

"I debated with myself for a second, then, taking the bull by the horns, I turned upon him suddenly.

"'Why this masquerading, Mr. Grimes?' I asked. 'What was your idea in getting me here on this case, only to capture me and keep me a prisoner? I am a poor man and you know it. I cannot pay the ransom you demand. And why are you robbing your colleagues and yourself?'

"I got no further, for he interrupted me by bursting into laughter. 'Grimes—Grimes!' he chortled. 'You think that I am old man Grimes! By the Almighty! That's good.'

"And still laughing to himself, he disappeared behind the curtain.

"But that is not all. The affair is growing more puzzling every minute. I am more convinced than ever that he is insane—or a drug fiend. For hardly had he disappeared before he returned, his entire manner changed, his body shaking nervously. Once more he was the feeble old man—or the hysterical woman. Without a word, he strode across the cave to the bruised and mutilated body of McGinnis and stood for a second, looking down at it, his shoulders hunched, his entire attitude that of great sorrow and dejection. Then he turned on his heel and walked away.

"As he disappeared behind the curtain, I will swear that I heard him sobbing. Yes, crying like a woman. And, what is more, I am certain that I heard him murmur as he went down the passageway:

"'Murder! Murder! A second murder! First Backus and now this poor, misguided creature! Great God in Heaven! Will it never end?'

"Can this be the man who, not ten minutes before, brutally jested as he looked upon the cold, dead clay that had done his bidding? It is beyond me."

CHAPTER XII

SHORTLY after writing the above, I talked the matter over with Travis. He concurred with me fully that something was strangely amiss with the man. He, however, did not agree with me that the masked leader was a drug addict, being more of the opinion that he was insane. He stated that he, as well as the others, had noticed other eccentricities on the part of their chief, but never so marked as on the occasion just referred to.

The day passed uneventfully, my guards whiling the time away playing cards, smoking and sleeping. There was nothing else for them to do and, like myself, the time hung heavily on their hands. Meanwhile, I seized upon this as a good time to spread my seeds of discord, using the masked man's peculiarities as a basis on which to work. They said little, but I could see that the seed was not sown on unfertile ground, for never is a man so ripe for dissension and mutiny as when his mind is unoccupied. In this, the masked mystery showed the one big mistake in his leadership—he did not give his men enough work. It was his Achilles heel—my sole salvation if I was to save my own skin—and I seized upon it.

"The Man in the Black Mask" failed to show himself until shortly after dusk when, just as we had completed our supper, he suddenly made his appearance and brusquely ordered Johnson and Snell to dig a shallow grave on the hillside.

They were about to comply when he turned upon Jenkins, who was whetting a carving knife, preparatory to cutting some bacon for breakfast.

"Jenkins," he snapped, "what did you knife 'Mac' for? No lying. Tell me the truth!"

The big negro dropped his work suddenly, his face taking on a grayish tinge. The perspiration came out on his forehead in great beads. He shook like a leaf, the cigarette he was smoking dropping from his thick lips.

"Fo' de Lord, sah, I didn't do it," he responded.

The leader's eyes glistened through the slits in his mask as he took a step closer to the colored man. He reminded me of a snake about to strike. I could see the men's faces grow tense, yet so strong was his command over them that not a word was spoken.

"You lie, damn you!" he snarled at the negro. "I've been doing a little investigating. I've found the place where he was killed—your tracks are there in the sand. I know that they are yours, for I've compared them with measurements.

"Let me tell you something, you skunk," he went on, shaking his finger under the black's nose. "You attempted to sneak up the passageway last night in an effort to find where I went to. You disobeyed orders in so doing. You wanted to turn state's evidence if occasion ever demanded. McGinnis saw you and followed. He was an honest man—even if he was a crook. He overtook you and accused you of trying to spy on me. You turned on him and, in the fight which followed, you went after him with your razor. When you had him down you finished him with your knife. He was unarmed and stood no show. It's all written there in the sand as plainly as if I'd seen you do it."

Before he could continue, the big black was upon him, knife upraised, bellowing like a maniac. The masked man's gun was out in an instant, spitting lead in a stream, but not soon enough to stop the negro's mad rush.

The knife plunged half a dozen times despite the fact that the frenzied black was mortally wounded. We, who had dodged out of range of the bullets, leaped forward as the two men fell to the ground together—but too late.

Bleeding from half a dozen wounds, the masked man dragged himself to his feet and, before we could interfere, he placed his gun against the head of his late antagonist and pulled the trigger, splattering out the negro's brains.

Then he hurled the weapon aside and, with a ghastly attempt at raillery, murmured:

"He got me. Damn him! He got me. The play's over. The curtain's about to drop. Larson, you win after all!"

With a convulsive shudder, he fell across the body of the man he had killed and who had, in turn, killed him.

CHAPTER XIII

CAME another surprise. For, with a shrill, piercing scream, the masked man's double appeared from around the corner of a projecting rock and, throwing his arms about the neck of the dead man, sobbed like a little child. We were petrified with astonishment.

And, at the same instant, from the tunnel behind the curtain, emerged a similar form. He dashed into the group. Then, as he saw his two doubles, he stepped back, too astonished for the instant for utterance.

"My God! Is she dead?" he whispered, huskily.

He jerked the mask from his face and disclosed the wrinkled visage of—*President John Grimes.*

"Quick, men!" he snapped. "For her sake—for the sake of Joan—I'll save you. Scatter down the tunnels. Hide yourselves somewhere—anywhere! They're coming—the officers! Some one has betrayed you. The cave is surrounded!"

Before he could continue, there came a glad scream from the masked man who was bending over the dead leader, and Joan Marne, her mask falling from her face, threw her arms about her uncle's neck, sobbing with happiness.

"Hands up! All of you!"

From every direction armed men poured into the cave, surrounding us, menacing us with their guns, taking us all prisoners. And, at their head was the man who had given the terse command—*Innis, the company attorney*—the man I had suspected of being the "Man in the Black Mask" himself.

He stepped over to me and seized me by the hand.

"Congratulations, Larson," he said. "Burke got your letter, but we had already paid over the money. However, we'll probably be able to recover it, for I see that our masked mystery is dead, and it's probably hidden about the cave somewhere. How in the world did you smuggle the note out, and why didn't you send it to Grimes or me instead of a white-livered calf like Burke? The mere fact that you sent the warning to him scared him half out of his wits. It's a wonder he gave it to me at all—the sneaking, little coward!"

"Burke—letter?" I muttered dazedly. "Why I sent no letter to Burke or anyone else. I've been held a prisoner here ever since yesterday afternoon. I've had no opportunity to send a letter to any one."

Both Grimes and the attorney crowded up to me. "But he said you did," Grimes chattered excitedly. "Bless my soul, if it hasn't got me puzzled."

"You and me both," answered Innis. "But, at any rate, our masked black-mailer has been laid low. Let's unmask him and see what he looks like."

Stepping over to the dead man, he jerked the mask from his face and dis-

closed the features, now cold in death—*of Jimmy Burke, the coward!*

CHAPTER XIV

THAT night, with the assistance of Innis, who was acting as state's attorney during the absence of his partner, I succeeded in clearing up the mystery. Joan and Grimes accompanied us to Burke's residence, where, among the papers hidden away in his desk, we found the diary which not only showed the part he had played, but implicated the cook at the Grimes home, as well as his various accomplices at the cave.

That Burke was insane, there is no doubt in my mind, although Innis disagrees with me. According to the story set forth in his diary, he conceived the idea of blackmailing the chemical company, of which he was a director, fully a year before he commenced the operations which resulted in his death.

In many ways the man was an anomaly. With the physique of a woman, he possessed the heart of a lion and the ambition of a Napoleon. Raised a pampered and petted child of wealthy parents, never allowed to mingle with other children of his age, he saturated himself with literature of the blood and thunder type, enjoying in his older years that which he was deprived of during his youth.

While wandering through the hills back of his residence, he chanced upon the opening to the tunnel which led into the cave. Covered by weeds and underbrush, it had long since been forgotten even by the older residents of the place.

Following the tunnel, he finally emerged into the cave. His explorations showed him that it had not been entered for years.

Leading from the cavern, like the spokes of a wheel, were unnumberable other tunnels, crossing and recrossing each other, making a perfect labyrinth,

for the original workers in the stone quarry—some half a century before—had followed only the peculiar vein-like formation through the sandstone instead of blasting out the entire hole as would be done in these modern times of high-priced labor.

In every particular he had, in his discussion with me, told me the truth. He did not need the money and actually, according to his diary, expected to rob his colleagues and himself, only to turn the money over to the poor. His principal idea, according to the story he left behind, was to satisfy his longing for excitement. He had laid his plans carefully, even to the extent of bribing poor Mrs. McGrady, Grimes' motherly old cook, into bombarding her employer with the notes he had written.

His piratical crew of gangsters he had recruited, as Travis had told me, through a crooked employment agency and had assembled them just as they had said. He had secured his weapons from a New York concern and shipped them by express as automobile parts. The enlargement of the silencer for the one pounder was his own idea.

He was, in every particular, an odd character, filled with good and evil and love of romance; he was in many respects a boy who would not grow up.

Yet, what to my mind shows his mental condition, was his betrayal of his confederates. For, following the finding of Backus' body, the board of directors had capitulated despite the protests of Grimes, who suddenly became panic-stricken on Joan's account, as I will explain later, and had hoisted the white flag and, acting under instructions telephoned from what was afterwards discovered to have been a tapped wire near his residence, had left the package of money on a stump close to the tunnel entrance.

The money in his possession, he had deliberately telephoned to Innis and

Grimes—using his own name—giving up to them the secret of the hidden entrance and telling them that I had written him a hasty note with the instructions.

Evidently, he had not been able to resist the temptation, however, of visiting his hidden cavern for the last time, trusting on his ability to get away before the raid. That he was an actor of extraordinary power was demonstrated by his ability to assume the two characters—the rôle of coward before his fellow board members and the gruff, sharp-toned leader in front of his men.

The money, in the original package in which he had received it, we found tucked away in the library safe.

That, following his unsuccessful attempt to murder me, he had deliberately planned to implicate Innis by "planting" the lavender-scented, initialed handkerchief, was described in detail in the little book which he had so faithfully kept. He had hated Innis for years, he confessed, because of a boyish quarrel. He felt that Innis had wronged him and, looking at the world from the warped standpoint he had assumed, had never forgiven.

As a result of my testimony, his confederates were given prison terms, I being able to prove conclusively that they were accessories both before and after the fact of both the murder of the chief of police and the scheme to blackmail the factory.

And thus passed into history one of the strangest criminal characters I have ever met in my long career as a criminal investigator—*Jimmy Burke, "The Man in the Black Mask."*

CHAPTER XV

SITTING in the parlor of the Grimes home, Joan and Grimes confessed to Innis and myself the parts they had played in the strange affair.

Grimes had accidentally discovered the entrance to the tunnel shortly after leaving me on the afternoon of my capture. Entering it, he found, a short distance from its mouth, the cache where Burke kept his various disguises. Just as he was about to leave to announce his discovery, he heard footsteps and, hiding behind a fallen rock, saw Joan enter, and, donning one of the outfits, strike boldly towards the cavern.

Too astonished for utterance, Grimes hastened away, laboring under the belief that Joan was, herself, "The Man in the Black Mask." She had always been a romantic young woman and the old man feared that she had, at last, given way to her inclination. Later, watching his opportunity, he had made several visits to the cavern.

As for Joan's part in the affair—it was purely accidental. Like all women, she imagined that she possessed detective ability and, because of Grimes' odd actions, due to worry, she had formed the conclusion that he was in financial straits and was, himself, the mysterious blackmailer.

As a child, she had played in the old tunnel. She remembered it now and shrewdly deduced it as the entrance to the hiding-place of "The Man in the Black Mask," following Backus' discovery of the shell fragment and my remark about the shot being fired down the creek. She had attempted to dissuade me from entering into the case because of her fear that I would unmask her uncle. This led her, also, to imitate the notes which had by means of the bribed cook been sent to Grimes, and to write and pin the counterfeit on my door.

There is nothing more to write. She and Grimes, working at cross purposes, suspecting each other, created the mixup which puzzled me so greatly in the cave. Oddly enough, they never chanced to meet nor to encounter Burke because of

the numerous tunnels through which they entered, after leaving the main one.

CHAPTER XVI

My work was finished. My fee had been paid. I was ready to go back, and yet I lingered at the invitation of John Grimes. For something stronger than the desire for a vacation held me in Elkhorn.

Yet, after a week had passed, I felt that I was no closer to my heart's desire than I had been the first day I met her. I felt, too, that I owed it to myself and my work to get back.

I announced my decision to Joan one evening as we stood under the moon close to the vine-covered arbor. She looked up at me, her great eyes wistfully pathetic, her soft hand resting on my arm, and whispered, as she had whispered on that eventful day when first we met:

"Don't go—*please!*"

I smiled as I demanded her reason for asking me to remain. It was the same—a woman's reason, always—the one little word:

"*Because.*"

I felt the indefinable warmth and fragrance from her. I saw the faint blush that swept over her face. Then my arms were around her—and the reader must guess the rest.

My wife swears that she forced me to propose.

I am president and general manager¹ of the Elkhorn Chemical Company now. President Grimes resigned six months ago. His work, he says, kept him from giving proper care and attention to a certain red-headed youngster whom we have named Jimmy Burke Larson.

For we owe our happiness to the man who brought us together—"The Man in the Black Mask."



"Then how," the coroner leaned far over the desk to ask the question, "do you account for the undeniable fact that your finger-prints are on the handle of the dagger?"—Page 29

The Unbelievable

By J. B. Hawley

I

DURING his world tour, undertaken at the behest and at the expense of the Chinese Government, Song Kee found much to admire. In this country, for example, he was impressed by a multitude of our ways and customs. And he frankly admitted their superiority over the Chinese equivalent or substitute of much that is distinctly American. In one respect, however, he contended that America was deficient in comparison with his own country. This was in the detection of crime.

"The Occidental detective," he stated one night in his precise, smoothly-spoken English, "is quite competent to deal with crime of the ordinary variety. It is when he approaches the unusual, the delicately subtle, that he is lost."

"And his inability," he went on, "to handle successfully the extraordinary crime is due for the most part, I think, to his inability to believe in the unbelievable."

Police Commissioner Oglethorpe, who was one of the half dozen men lounging in the smoking room of the Travelers, smiled.

"It would seem to me," he said, and his voice was mildly sarcastic, "that detection of crime depends less upon the detective's powers of belief than upon his powers of observation and his ability to uncover facts."

Song Kee shrugged his shoulders.

"Facts, my dear Commissioner," he replied, "are the bane of your Western civilization. You are a very young people. It will be several centuries before

you learn that facts are not necessarily truths. Had I a secret, I would hide it—not under a bushel of lies—but under a bushel of facts."

The Commissioner turned away.

"Yet Judges and juries have an odd predilection for facts," he murmured.

"Which they, too, often mistake as sign posts towards Truth," was Song Kee's parting shot.

It was some weeks later that New York was startled by the murder of Irene Grenville. She was an actress who had attained an unusual prominence partly because of her real histrionic ability and partly because of the strange tales of her private life which circulated throughout the city.

Always there had been stories about her. Even in her early days, when she had played small parts in an uptown stock company, whispers about her wildness and depravity had crept to the ears of those who knew her. As she climbed higher on the professional ladder the whispers had become louder and reached a greater audience. When at last she reached stardom she was known from the Battery to the Bronx as the wickedest woman on Broadway, that street popularly supposed to be a cesspool of iniquity.

Now she had been found dead in the public hall of the hotel she had called home. A knife had been thrust into her lovely bosom. And all New York clamored to know the identity of her murderer.

The essential facts brought out at the coroner's inquest were as follows:

Sophie Mallory, a chambermaid in the

Ralston Hotel, where the deceased had lived, stated that at seven-fifteen on the night of the murder she had been standing at one end of the public hallway on the fourth floor. She was occupied at the time with the sorting of soiled linen preparatory to sending it downstairs to the laundry. She had seen Miss Grenville leave her rooms. Closing the door of her sitting-room, which was near the end of the hall where the deponent was working, the actress walked rapidly down the hall toward the elevator.

Question by the Coroner:—Except for yourself, was the deceased alone in the hall?

Witness:—No, sir. A man was coming toward her from the other end of the hall?

Question:—How far apart were they when you last saw them?

Witness:—About five or six feet apart, sir.

Question:—At that time had the man reached or passed the deceased?

Witness:—Neither, sir.

Question by the Foreman of the Jury:—Did you recognize the man?

Witness:—No, sir. Not then.

The chambermaid went on with her story. This was to the effect that she had resumed her task of sorting the linen, turning her back on the hall where Miss Grenville and the man were walking. But hardly had she turned and started her work before she had been startled by a shriek of agony. Terror-stricken, she had turned back to the hall. There she saw the deceased lying on the floor. The man was bending over her. She had run to them and found Miss Grenville dead—stabbed through the heart. And the man bending over the body she had recognized as Mr. George Grover, a young man who had a suite on the floor above.

Question:—Did Mr. Grover say anything to you?

Witness:—No, sir. Not to me direct-

ly, sir. But he kept repeating over and over, "Good God! She's dead! She's dead!"

Sophie Mallory was excused. The next witness was Detective Sergeant Delaney of the Branch Detective Bureau.

Delaney spoke in the calm, unemotional tone of a man to whom giving testimony in court is an ordinary occurrence. He stated that he had gone to the Ralston Hotel on the night of the murder in response to a telephone call from the management. He had found Irene Grenville dead. She had been stabbed through the heart. The dagger was still sticking in the body. Among the people gathered around the dead woman he had spoken to Sophie Mallory and to George Grover. After he had heard the chambermaid's story, he had arrested Grover on suspicion.

"And besides," he volunteered, "the man looked like he had done the trick. He was white and shaking like a leaf."

Further he testified that with the permission of the coroner he had removed from the body of the deceased the fatal dagger and taken it to headquarters to be examined for finger-prints.

Question:—Were there finger-prints on the dagger?

Witness:—There were.

Question:—Can you state whose?

Witness:—I can. They were the finger-prints of George Grover.

The next witness was Marie Thibault, an excitable Frenchwoman who for many years had been maid to Miss Grenville. All that she had to tell was that George Grover had been acquainted with her mistress and that there had been some bad feeling between them.

"I cannot say what was the matter," she said. "All I know is that the last time Monsieur brought Mad'moiselle home from the theatre, Mad'moiselle, she say to me, 'Marie, nevaire let me see that crazy man some more'."

A hush fell over the court-room when,

accompanied by a uniformed policeman, George Grover entered. He was a young man of rather pleasing demeanor, carefully but quietly dressed. In normal circumstances he would have passed anywhere without causing remark. Now his face was pale and his eyes gleamed with a feverish excitement. His suppressed emotion gave to his not distinctive features an expression interesting and at the same time provocative of sympathy. As he took the witness stand a woman in the rear of the court-room cried out faintly.

He gave his testimony in a quiet, subdued manner, speaking without emphasis or intonation like a man talking in his sleep. After answering the usual formal questions as to name, address and occupation, which last he gave as student of Oriental languages, he said that on the night of Miss Grenville's murder he had gone down the stairs from the fifth floor to the fourth of the hotel to keep an appointment he had had in the apartment of Mr. Sito Okawa, an attaché of the Japanese embassy. Mr. Okawa had promised to lend him a book on certain Japanese myths. Yes, he had seen Miss Grenville and had bowed to her.

"What happened then?" the coroner asked.

"I passed her."

The coroner smiled incredulously.

"You passed her?"

"Yes, I passed her. I had just taken a step or two when she cried out. Before I could turn she had fallen to the floor. She was dead."

The coroner hesitated a moment, regarding Grover steadily before he asked his next question.

"Did you touch the dagger with which she was stabbed?"

Grover shuddered.

"I did not," he stated in the most impressive tone he had used thus far.

"Then how," the coroner leaned far over the desk to ask the question, "do

you account for the undeniable fact that your finger-prints are on the handle of the dagger?"

With bated breath the occupants of the court-room awaited his reply. It came in a low, despairing voice.

"I cannot account for it," the witness answered.

The coroner leaned back in his chair. When he spoke again it was almost indifferently, as though he were asking the question as a matter of form.

"Had you and the deceased quarreled?"

The witness shook his head.

"Quarreled, no," he answered. "Once I ventured to suggest to Miss Grenville that she was ruining herself by the kind of life she was leading. She resented what she called my interference and told me that she did not want to see me again."

Slowly, almost languidly, he left the witness stand.

One more witness remained to be examined. This was the Mr. Sito Okawa with whom Grover claimed to have had an appointment. He was a short, dapper Japanese of the extremely intelligent type, suave, polite to the verge of the ridiculous.

After bowing low to the court and to the jury he took the witness stand. He stated that on the night of the murder he had indeed had an appointment with Mr. Grover. To the best of his belief, however, the time when they were to have met in his rooms had been eight-fifteen rather than seven-fifteen.

Then the coroner sent the jury to their deliberations. These did not consume a great deal of time. In less than five minutes the twelve men were back in their places, the foreman ready to recite their verdict. It was what everyone had expected. Irene Grenville had come to her death from the blow of a dagger driven into her heart by one George Grover, whom they recommended should

be held to await action by the Grand Jury.

Two days later the Grand Jury indicted the unfortunate young man. He was taken to the Tombs to await trial. And after a week or so New York forgot all about him, being concerned with matters of newer and greater importance. The baseball season opened—and a quite scandalous performance, the work of a degenerate French playwright, was being run at one of the largest theatres.

II

SONG KEE'S participation in the Grenville murder case came about in a singular manner. One night as he entered his club for dinner after an afternoon unprofitably spent in investigating the administration of the city's poor-laws, the doorman told him that a visitor was awaiting him in the Ladies' Room.

"A visitor for me?" Song Kee inquired, lifting his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir. A lady, sir."

Song Kee turned slowly and entered the Ladies' Room. There, standing before the onyx fireplace of which every member of the Travelers is justly proud, stood a woman. She was young, handsomely gowned and beautiful. Her loveliness was not of the gorgeous, riotous sort which startles one into instant admiration, but gentle, modest like the beauty of a wild-flower, appealing not to the many but to the appreciative few. Song Kee bowed low before her.

"You wish to see me, madam?" he asked with smiling courtesy.

"Are you Mr. Song Kee?" The woman put her query in a voice of amazing fulness and depth.

"At your service, madam."

Again Song Kee bowed almost to the floor.

The woman stood silent before him. She seemed on the verge of speech, but

hesitated as though in search of adequate words. Then:

"Mr. Kee, I am in frightful trouble. I—I have come to you to ask your help."

"My help, madam? Why I—"

"I know," she interrupted, "you do not even know who I am. Still," she paused, "I am Sylvia Granger. I was engaged," she threw her head up proudly, "I still am engaged to marry Mr. George Grover."

Song Kee's brow puckered into a puzzled frown.

The woman looked at him in amazement.

"Surely," she said incredulously, "you must have heard of Mr. Grover. He is accused of the murder of Miss Grenville"

A look of comprehension dawned in Song Kee's face.

"Ah, yes," he said, "the actress in the Hotel Ralston. I read of the case in the newspapers."

A wave of emotion swept over the woman.

"Oh, Mr. Kee!" she cried. "He didn't do it. He couldn't have! I don't care what they say—he couldn't have!"

She brushed her hand across her forehead, swaying backward. Song Kee sprang forward and helped her into a chair.

"Now, Miss Ganger," he said gently after a moment during which she had regained her self-control, "please tell me as calmly as you can why you have come to me and what it is that you wish me to do."

The woman looked him full in the eyes.

"I want you to help me to prove George Grover innocent," she said. And then she hurried on as though to forestall any possible refusal from Song Kee. "Do you remember some weeks ago here in this club, you and Mr. Oglethorpe had a discussion about the detection of crime? You stated your belief



She brushed her hand across her forehead, swaying backward—Page 30

in the superiority of the methods of your own people. My brother happened to overhear the conversation. He repeated it to me. And I am here, Mr. Kee, to beg, to implore you to use those methods in which you believe to investigate this frightful crime which has drawn into its net someone whom I hold dear. You," her voice was tremulous with despair, "you are my last hope."

For a little Song Kee remained silent, staring contemplatively at the floor.

Then he rose and began to pace the room.

"Miss Granger," he said at last, pausing before the woman whose eyes did not falter beneath his steady gaze. "In China men are taught to respect certain things as sacred. One of these is the faith of a good woman. I respect your faith in your fiancé's innocence. I am inclined to do my small best to help you justify it. But tell me what it is that makes you so sure of Mr. Grover's innocence. As I recall the evidence brought out at the inquest, it was strongly against him."

With the Chinaman's words a gleam of hope had come to Sylvia Granger.

She leaned forward eagerly.

"I have no facts to justify my faith, Mr. Kee," she said, "but I have what is worth innumerable facts—my knowledge of the man I love. You have said, or implied, that I am a good woman. I believe—I hope I am. But this I know. I know that in my heart no man, were he ever so clever, could have reached the place George Grover holds were he capable of imagining, let alone committing, the dastardly crime of which my fiancé is accused."

Song Kee had listened carefully to her. When she had finished he resumed his pacing to and fro, stopping from time to time before her and gazing down at her with unseeing eyes. He paused at last with the manner of one who has arrived at a decision. Sylvia Granger

breathed — "You will help me?"

It was more a prayer than a question. Song Kee wrenched himself away from the thoughts which had absorbed him.

"Yes," he said, "I will help you. But do not expect too much. All that I can do is to promise that I will look into this case as thoroughly as my poor abilities will permit."

Sylvia Granger sprang to her feet.

"Thank you! Thank you!" she cried. "And whether you succeed or whether you fail to save George, please know that you will always have my gratitude and my friendship."

"Which should be more than enough reward for any man," Song Kee said, smiling as he bowed her out of the room.

III

THE man who left his rooms on a side street off Madison Avenue was a far different Song Kee from the quietly dressed, well-poised man of the world who had promised help to Sylvia Granger at the Traveler an hour or so earlier. His clothes, his linen, his hat—a brown derby with an exceedingly curly brim—were of the fashion of Broadway rather than of Fifth Avenue. His shoes were of a gorgeous tan, contrasting gaily with pale lavender socks.

And in keeping with his clothes, the man himself had changed. The dignity which ordinarily characterized his manner and expression was gone. In its place was a sort of childishly good-natured meekness, not unattractive but in a way almost ridiculous.

He hurried westward until he had crossed Eighth Avenue. Midway in the block he paused before the doorway of the — Branch Detective Bureau. He looked up at the lighted windows and smiled to himself. Not long ago when his study of American customs and methods had led to an examination of the Police System, he had been a familiar

and not unpopular figure in and around the old brownstone building. Often since then he had looked back with pleasure to the nights spent in the back room where the boys gathered and passed the time in spinning yarns of their experiences.

A moment later Song Kee entered that back room. He was greeted clamorously by its occupants. Laughing and joking he crossed to the table where a big man sat, his chair tilted back against the wall, his hat pulled forward over his eyes.

"Hello, Mr. Delaney," Song Kee said in purring, good-natured tones.

The big man looked up.

"Well, dog-gone it, if it ain't a Ching-a-ling! How's your soul, you yeller heathen? Wha'd'y want around here?"

Song Kee took the man's rough greeting in good part.

"What do I want?" he laughed.

"Maybe I want to hear Mr. Delaney tell about the Grenville murder."

Delaney glanced at him suspiciously.

"Say, what's your interest in the Grenville case?" he asked belligerently.

"Oh, nothing much. I just promised a friend I'd look into it."

Delaney spat disgustedly.

"Well, you'll be wastin' your time. The case is an open and shut thing. Grover's the guy, and we got him. That's all there is about that."

"I thought perhaps—" Song Kee began.

"Aw, fergit it." Delaney interrupted. "The Grenville dame was croaked and Grover done it. He was caught with the goods, wasn't he?" Didn't the chambermaid see him?"

"Well, according to the papers she didn't actually see him stab the woman."

"Naw. But she seen him near the woman just before she was stabbed and that's enough for me. Besides, didn't we find his finger-prints on the dagger and he himself says he never touched it

after it was in the woman. Then he must have touched it before, mustn't he?"

Song Kee shook his head meditatively.

"I—I suspose so," he said, "still—"

Delaney pushed back his chair violently.

"Aw, say, you! You make me sick—always buttin' in where you ain't wanted. You—" he paused. Then his manner changed.

"Say," he went on, "some of the boys around here think I'm sore on you because of that little mess we had awhile ago. Now just to show 'em the kind of guy I am I'll make you a proposition. If you think you can get anythin' out of this here Grenville case I've missed, go to it! Go as far as you like and I'll help you."

Song Kee's mild eyes gleamed with excitement.

"You mean that, Mr. Delaney?"

"I said it, didn't I?"

Song Kee pulled up a chair and for a quarter of an hour the two men talked in whispers, Song Kee speaking quickly and excitedly, Delaney listening and making replies in the tolerant manner one uses toward a child. Then they got up and left the building.

They took the Subway downtown to Headquarters, where on Delaney's authority Song Kee was permitted to examine the dagger through the agency of which Irene Grenville had met her death.

It was an oddly shaped weapon, with a long handle roughly carved, tapering toward the blade. There was no guard dividing handle and blade. The blade was of an unusual narrowness, shaped like an enlarged bodkin, very sharp at the point, duller at the sides.

With Delaney standing impatiently by, Song Kee favored the deadly instrument with a long examination. Twice he laid it back on the table and turned away from it. But something about it seemed

to fascinate him and he returned to it. At last he drew a small rule from his pocket and measured it with great exactness, noting down the measurements on the back of an envelope upon which at the same time he made a most detailed drawing. Then he said to Delaney—

"Is there any proof that this dagger belonged to Grover?"

"Not as I know of. We didn't bother about that. The finger-prints were enough for us."

"What did he say about it?"

"Aw, of course he denied ever seein' the thing before."

"Yes, he would do that," Song Kee said.

He picked up the dagger again, holding it by the blade, the end of the handle thus pointed at the detective.

"I wonder," he said, "why there should be all those little notches along the top of the handle?"

Delaney glanced at the weapon indifferently.

"Why shouldn't there be? Ain't it carved all over?"

"Yes, but—"

Song Kee stopped and smiled at the detective.

"Maybe I'm just imagining things, Mr. Delaney," he said, leading the way from the room.

Before the doorway of Police Headquarters Song Kee paused.

"Delaney," he said, "did you find any motive for the killing of this Grenville woman either by Grover—or by anyone else?"

Delaney puffed at a cigar he had just fired.

"Well, I figure it this way. Grover was in love with the dame. And he was what I call a 'one-woman-guy.' But the 'one-woman-one-man' stuff didn't go with Irene. Anything that wore pants and packed a wad of bills looked good to her. Grover got sore and—woof!" Delaney made an expressive gesture.

"But Grover said—"

"Fergit it, kid. I know what Grover said — but — well—" And Delaney winked broadly.

The next day Song Kee devoted to the curious pursuit of reading old newspapers.

From publication office to publication office he went, going through the files of the morning and evening dailies. He himself could not have told exactly for what he was searching. But he kept on looking, and toward nightfall in a journal noted for its news of the theatrical world he found an item which intrigued him. Surreptitiously he cut it from the paper, and preserving it carefully in his pocketbook, quietly hurried away.

He journeyed uptown to his rooms. For a long time he sat motionless by the window staring unseeingly into the street. His face was as devoid of expression as that of a wooden Indian. Only his eyes were alive and they shone with a lively interest and an intense concentration. Suddenly an exclamation broke from his lips. He jumped to his feet and with the quickness of thought changed into a dinner jacket and left.

He took a taxi to the Ralston Hotel and sent up his card to Mr. Sito Okawa. After a few moments' wait, he was asked to ascend to the apartment of the Japanese attaché.

He found the room to which he was admitted in some disorder. Open suitcases were on the floor. A half-packed English kit-bag stood on a chair against which leaned a strapped bundle of umbrellas and canes. In the centre stood Okawa in an embroidered jacket, smoking as he directed his valet in the business of packing. He came forward to greet Song Kee.

There ensued an exchange of courtesies in which only two Orientals could seriously indulge. Then—

"My business, Mr. Okawa," Song

Kee said, "is of small importance—a question about a Mr. Grover whom I believe you knew."

Sito Okawa made a gesture of sadness.

"Ah, that poor young man," he said in tone of deepest melancholy.

"You believe him guilty then of the killing of this dancing woman?"

"I?" Okawa shrugged his shoulders. "I believe nothing, really. How should I? All I know is what the papers printed about the unfortunate affair. But your question, my dear friend?"

"Quite so," Song Kee answered briskly. "It is about the appointment he is said to have had with you on the night of the murder. Are you quite sure it was for eight-fifteen rather than seven-fifteen as he has stated?"

Okawa contemplated the end of his cigarette consideringly.

"Sure, Mr. Song Kee?" he said at length. "How can we be sure of anything in this most remarkable world? Still, I have the distinct impression that the hour set for our meeting was eight-fifteen."

"When did you make this appointment?"

"That same day at luncheon."

Song Kee sighed deeply.

"The poor fellow," he said. "I'm afraid there is nothing one can do for him. I have tried, but—" he sighed again.

Then he pulled himself together and extended his hand.

"It is most good of you to have received me so kindly. I will relieve you now of my troublesome presence, as I can see that you are busy." He pointed to the half-completed packing. "You are leaving town?"

"Tomorrow or the next day," Okawa replied. "My duties at the legation will require my presence in Washington. And I prepare for the possibility of a sudden start."

Song Kee made his adieux. He bowed low and still lower backing toward the door. In his passage he stumbled against the bundle of umbrellas and canes leaning against the chair and knocked them with a clatter to the floor.

His apologies for his awkwardness were absurdly profuse. He picked up the things he had knocked down and stood fingering them nervously while he called himself several kinds of a clumsy, ungainly fool.

Okawa smilingly waved the apologies aside and relieving him of the bundle accompanied him to the door.

Song Kee looked out into the hall.

"It was just here in front of this door that the tragedy occurred, was it not?" he asked.

Okawa shook his head.

"No, my friend. A few feet further toward the elevator. There—just beneath that electric globe."

Song Kee advanced to the spot indicated. Slowly Okawa followed him.

The Chinaman stood silent for a moment.

"So," he said finally, "the dancing woman was about here, going in the direction of the elevator?"

"And Mr. Grover came along about here," Okawa turned around so that he faced Song Kee.

The little Chinaman seemed to have forgotten Okawa's presence. His eyes traveled slowly, as though measuring distance, down the hall. They stopped at a point on the wall perhaps twenty feet away. Then he smiled contentedly as one quite satisfied with the progress of events.

A discreet cough from Okawa brought him to himself. He turned and again thanking the Japanese for his courtesy, hurried off down the hall.

At the desk downstairs he drew the clerk aside and presented a card bearing Delaney's name and a request to the hotel management to give the bearer

what assistance he might require.

"Tell me," he said, "who occupied the room four doors down the hall from Mr. Okawa on the night Miss Grenville was killed?"

The clerk consulted the guests' list.

"That will be room four-thirty-eight. The room was empty that night," he announced.

"And when rooms are empty are they left unlocked?"

"As a rule, no. But the maids are sometimes careless. We cannot watch all the time."

"And the room opposite?" Song Kee asked.

"Let's see. That is Count Angellotti's bedroom."

"Thank you," Song Kee said as he turned away.

It was a smiling and somewhat excited Song Kee who stood at the entrance of the hotel and consulted his watch.

He hurried to a little Chinese restaurant on Fourth Avenue where he indulged in strange dishes with stranger names never printed on a Chinese-American menu. Then he dashed into the Subway and was borne swiftly southward.

He came to the surface of the Bridge. He journeyed north on Park Row until it changed into the Bowery. Then he turned into a side street leading through a ravine of ill-kept tenements toward the East River. At a house not far from the corner he stopped. He descended into the basement and knocked vigorously on a black, greasy door.

A minute or so later, the door was opened ever so slightly and from out of the darkness gleamed a pair of slanting eyes.

Song Kee said a few words in a southern Chinese dialect and was admitted to the house.

"Take me to your most respected master," he said in the same tongue.

His guide led him along an evil smell-

ing hall, up a flight of rickety stairs ending in a sheet metal door. With a key which dangled at his waist the guide opened the door and drew aside for Song Kee to pass.

The room Song Kee entered seemed only an ante-chamber to still another apartment. It was empty, but through a door at the rear could be heard the sound of many voices.

"Wait here," the guide said with great respect, "and I will call my master."

He disappeared into the inner room, returning shortly with another Chinaman. He was a man of many years whose emaciated frame was accentuated by the long plum-colored robe which hung in loose, rich folds from his shoulders. When he recognized his visitor he bowed almost to the floor.

"You do my poor house great honor," he said in a thin, quavering voice.

Song Kee drew near and spoke in low, peremptory tones.

The aged Chinaman bowed again. Then he turned to the servant.

"Go," he ordered, "to the barbarian they name the 'Rat' and say to him that I would borrow the tools of his trade for an evening."

Fifteen minutes later Song Kee left the house carrying in his pocket a ring of strangely shaped keys.

He returned to the Ralston Hotel. This time he did not enter through the main doorway which faced the Avenue but through a lesser entrance on the side street. Unconcernedly he strolled through the corridors until he reached a stairway leading to the upper floors. When he was quite certain that he was unnoticed by any of the hotel employees he ran quickly up this stairway until it curved around the elevator shaft and he was free from observation. Then he made his way more slowly until he reached the fourth floor.

Down the hallway in which Irene Grenville had been killed he moved cau-

tiously until he reached a certain doorway. A great sigh of relief came through his parted lips as, looking up, he saw that the transom was dark. As quickly as though he were a professional thief he drew the ring of oddly shaped keys from his pocket and tried them one by one until the lock beneath his hand turned. Softly as though stealing into a chamber of death he stole into the room.

His errand within took him no more than five or perhaps ten minutes to complete. Then as silently and as cautiously as he had entered, he withdrew, relocking the door behind him.

But he did not come away empty handed. Under his loose coat he clung firmly to something, holding it eagerly as though it were of great value to him.

Not caring now whether or not he were seen, he walked boldly down the hall and waited for the elevator, which a moment later bore him to the main corridor below.

Now his hurry and excitement were over. What he had set out to do he had accomplished. Leisurely he turned his steps homeward. At a corner drug store he stopped, and spent a few moments telephoning. A half hour later he was in bed sleeping as quietly as a tired child.

IV

THE next morning at eleven o'clock five people were gathered in Police Commissioner Oglethorpe's office at headquarters awaiting the coming of Song Kee. The Commissioner himself sat at his desk going through his morning's mail. Detective Sergeant Delaney stood beside the window looking down into Centre Street and talked in subdued whispers to a representative from the District Attorney's office. In a far corner sat Sylvia Granger beside her fiancé, Grover. They did not talk, but just sat there hand in hand waiting expectantly.

At five minutes after the hour, Song Kee was ushered into the room. He was immaculately garbed in morning coat, striped trousers and patent leather boots. In one hand he carried a silk hat in the latest mode, in the other a cane. When Delaney saw him he gasped. In dress and manner he was so different from the little Chinaman who used to lounge in the backroom of the — Branch Detective Bureau, tolerated for his good nature and his generosity in the matter of fairly good cigars. His surprise was changed to awe when he saw the Commissioner rise and greet the Chinaman with the respect one shows to an equal.

Song Kee bowed low to Miss Granger and the Commissioner. He greeted Delaney with a genial wave of the hand. Then he hung his hat on the Commissioner's rack and leaned his cane carefully against it. These details attended to he seated himself comfortably in the centre of the room.

"I must apologize for keeping you all waiting," he said, "but my taxi was delayed—a little argument between my driver and one of your excellent traffic policemen. But now that I am here we can proceed at once with the matter in hand.

"You are all here," he continued, "at my request. Be assured, I would not have sent for you had the affair not been urgent. I have done three things—proved the validity of certain statements I once made to you, Mr. Oglethorpe; given Miss Granger the help she asked for, and taken advantage of Mr. Delaney's offer to 'go to it' if I thought I could discover anything he had overlooked in the Grenville murder case."

A half suppressed snort from Delaney interrupted him. He turned.

"Yes, Mr. Delaney," he said gently, "I have found several little things which you overlooked—one of which is the real murderer of Irene Grenville."

Sylvia Granger started from her chair.

"Then—then—" she began, but words failed her and she sank back beside Grover, her eyes fixed doubtfully upon the Chinaman.

"Miss Granger," Song Kee said smiling across the room, "Mr. Grover is as innocent as you or I of the Grenville woman's death. In a few moments I think I shall be able to convince these gentlemen of that fact."

"Well, you'll have to go some, young man," the rather officious Assistant District Attorney put in. "The evidence we have—"

"Would be enough to convict the Commissioner himself," Song Kee laughed, "if wrongly applied." He paused.

"I can see that you, like Mr. Delaney, have been taken in by facts. And as I told Mr. Oglethorpe once when we discussed these matters, facts are not always sign-posts to the truth. The clever criminal will conceal his crime beneath misleading facts, rather than lies. In this case the criminal chose to create facts pointing to the guilt of another. And to use a phrase of your delightful slang, 'you fell for it'."

"Aw, fer the love of Mike, get on." This from Delaney, *sotto voce*.

Song Kee overheard him. "Very well, Mr. Delaney, I will 'get on'." He turned to the Commissioner.

"Mr. Oglethorpe, you will recall that my complaint about the Occidental detective concerned his inability to believe in the unbelievable. That applied in this case. Mr. Delaney here, who, by the way, is an efficient man, was convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that Mr. Grover was guilty of the murder of Irene Grenville. He was taken in by the facts presented—the 'almost' eye-witness to the act—the finger-prints on the dagger. When I suggested to him that perhaps another might have killed the danc-

ing woman, he laughed at me. The idea was beyond belief and as such he would not believe in it."

Delaney clenched his unlighted cigar more firmly between his teeth and muttered, "Yes, and I'd like to see the guy that could."

"Now, I'll admit," Song Kee continued, paying no attention to the interruption, "that Mr. Delaney did not have the incentive that I had to believe in the unbelievable. He had not had the pleasure of meeting Miss Granger nor had he drawn inspiration from her faith in her fiancé's innocence. So—

"But to go on. I started to work from the point of view that the accused man was innocent. Therefore someone else must have committed the crime. But who? To find that out was my task. And at the outset I was very much at sea.

"I went to see my friend, Mr. Delaney. But he could do little to help me. His opinion, you see, was—well, prejudiced. However, through his kindness, I found out the names and all there was to know about the occupants of the rooms on the floor where the dancing woman had lived. Then, this information was of little use. One and all they were beyond suspicion. Then Mr. Delaney brought me down here and showed me the fatal dagger.

"Here was something interesting, and, it seemed to me, important could I but see it. It was a queer knife—very long with a straight handle running into a needle shaped blade. And there was something else peculiar about it. The top of the handle was carved with little notches and they were not in keeping with the carving on the rest of the handle. Also they were newly cut. Why? I could not answer—then."

Song Kee paused. His audience was silent, tensely, eagerly waiting for him to continue.

"My next clue, I found in the files of one of your daily papers." he went on.

"I knew of no other place to seek the identity of someone who might desire Miss Grenville's death. But I reasoned that in some column of stage and Broadway gossip I might find something to put me on the track. I did. It was only a tiny paragraph, but it gave the reason why someone—someone I knew of—might kill the dancing woman. It merely related the return to his own country of a young foreigner whom she had ruined—in honor as well as in pocketbook. This young foreigner came of a family that holds its honor very dear. And by a strange coincidence, the young man's brother had an apartment on the same floor with the woman who had dragged in the mud the honor of his family."

"Say, you don't mean the dago count, Angellotti?" Delaney shouted.

Song Kee held up his hand.

"Patience," he said; "we'll come to that later."

"In China," he resumed, "we have a saying to the effect that truth grows out of thought and concentration. I applied it. In my rooms I gave myself over to meditation. I had found someone who might have desired the death of the dancing woman. If I could discover a way in which he could have killed her, I might be making progress. And after a little, I did discover a way. From out of the realm of my subconscious mind there flashed an idea. What if the Grenville woman had not been stabbed at all—but shot? What if the instrument were not a dagger—but an arrow? Then I remembered that the people from whom the foreigner was sprung had been the world's greatest archers since the tenth century. Also I remembered the freshly cut notches on the handle of the knife—notches which might be used to catch in the string of a bow."

He stopped and glanced around the room. The impression he had made on his hearers was one that would have satisfied an actor most avid for attention.

Oglethorpe and the Assistant District Attorney were listening intently. Sylvia Granger and her lover, whose hand she still held, were leaning forward, their eyes glowing with excitement. Even Delaney, the skeptic, had dropped his pose of indifference.

Song Kee continued.

"My next step was to visit the scene of the crime to discover—well, if the thing could have been done as I had imagined. And incidentally I paid my respects to Mr. Sito Okawa, a most courteous gentleman. That visit was productive of several things. One was the knowledge of exactly where the dancing woman had been when she was killed. And standing where she had been, I saw the place from which an arrow could have been shot. Mr. Delaney had given me the approximate angle at which the knife had been driven into the body and this angle corresponded to that which would have obtained had the woman been killed by an arrow shot through the open transom of a room twenty-five feet down the hall.

"I left Mr. Okawa and questioned the clerk of the hotel. He told me that on the night of the murder the room in question had been unoccupied. The room opposite was the bedroom of Count Angellotti."

"Then it was the dago you suspected?" Delaney again broke out.

Song Kee smiled softly upon the now thoroughly excited detective. He seemed about to answer him. Then he changed his mind and said, "Will you pass me my cane, Mr. Delaney?"

"Mr. Grover," he said when Delaney had handed him the cane, "have you ever seen this cane before?"

He held out the bamboo stick.

Grover started in surprise. The seeming irrelevance of the question dazed him for an instant. Then he looked closely at the cane.

"Why, yes, I think so," he said hesi-

tatingly. Then: "Yes, yes, I remember. It's—"

But Song Kee stopped him.

"Sh!" he said quickly. "Would you mind writing the name of its owner on that slip of paper on the desk beside you?"

As Grover obeyed, he went on.

"Now, gentlemen, I must confess to a slight infraction of your laws. The next thing I did was to provide myself with some skeleton keys. Armed with these I again visited the fourth floor of the Ralston Hotel. In the room I unlawfully entered I found that for which I searched. I found the bow that had driven the arrow into Irene Grenville's breast."

He answered the question in their eyes.

"You are wondering what I did with it. I brought it here. It is *here*."

He held out the cane.

"Look!"

With a deft movement he pulled at the handle. It came out of the bamboo stick. And the handle was the hilt of a long, evilly shaped knife, the blade of which had been hidden in the hollow of the bamboo.

"This," he said in explanation, "is the arrow which brought death to the dancing woman. Through the kindness of Mr. Delaney I was able to borrow it this morning. And this," he bent the long stick of bamboo, "is the bow. String it with a piece of cord beyond the joints at either end and you have a deadly and effective weapon."

"Wait a minute—wait a minute," Delaney shouted. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Commissioner, but let's get this thing straight. D'ye mean to say *Mister* Song Kee, that some guy who had it in for the Grenville woman hid in the vacant room and potted her when she went down the hall?"

"Exactly."

"Pretty fishy! But we won't say

nothin' about that. Maybe though you won't mind tellin' me, if this cock and bull story of yours is true, how Grover's finger-prints come to be on the knife?"

Song Kee smiled patiently.

"How did your own get there?"

"Mine—they never were there!"

Song Kee smiled again, but less patiently.

"Listen, Mr. Delaney. Just a few moments ago I asked you to pass me my cane. You did so, giving it to me by the handle. Now, providing someone who touched it after you, wearing gloves and touching it only at its very end, had pulled it from its sheath and using it as an arrow had shot it into a body—whose finger-prints would then be on it?"

He laughed outright at the expression on Delaney's face.

"I don't blame you," he said, "for your surprise. 'We are dealing in this case with a man who was very subtle—a man who manufactured, not lies, but facts, to cover his crime. One must marvel at him. Patiently he waited and studied the habits of the woman he had come to kill. He found that she invariably left her apartments on her way to the theatre promptly at seven-fifteen. He arranged that someone should be in the hall at that time on the night he intended to murder her. He even arranged that the finger-prints of that person should be upon the weapon he was to use. This he contrived by the very simple method which I have just now used to convince the skeptical Mr. Delaney. Read, Mr. Grover, the name of the murderer on the slip of paper you are holding in your hand."

In a trembling voice Grover read the name he had written in compliance with Song Kee's request that the identity of the owner of the cane be set down on paper rather than spoken.

"Sito Okawa."

"Now tell us when and where you last saw Mr. Okawa's cane."

"In the restaurant at luncheon on the day of the murder. It was the occasion upon which we made the appointment to meet in his rooms that night. He was leaving without it. When he remembered it, and as I was nearer to it than he, he asked me to hand it to him."

"Which you did—and left your fingerprints on the handle."

Song Kee rose and bowed like a showman finished with his exhibition.

At once everyone in the room began to talk, plying him with questions. The jangling of the telephone brought a tardy silence. Commissioner Oglethorpe answered it.

"Yes? Good God! Go on, go on! He left a note? Read it."

Oglethorpe hung up the receiver with a bang.

He turned to his companions and said gravely:

"Sito Okawa killed himself in the Ralston Hotel last night. A note was found beside his body saying that he had killed Irene Grenville to avenge the dishonored name of his family."

Everyone except Song Kee and Delaney stared fixedly at the Commissioner. Delaney was watching the Chinaman, who was standing unmoved and unperturbed, looking out of the window.

"Say, Mr. Song Kee," the detective said grimly. "What did you have to do with this last?"

Song Kee shrugged.

"Perhaps nothing—perhaps everything," he answered. "I don't know. Last night when I went to his room I left a message. It was to the effect that it would be unfitting that the person of one of the Samurai be held in bondage and punished by foreigners even in the enforcement of their laws. . . . It may be that he understood."





*"Your friends here are trying to get me to admit I've been picking pockets lately,
and it's not so"—Page 50*

The Georgetown Mystery

By William Wallace Major

IT was seven o'clock in the morning and Marshal John McAlpin, of Georgetown, was frenziedly ringing a wall telephone at Herman Matthews' store.

"Gimme Rockland, quick!" he shouted into the transmitter when he at last had the operator on the wire. "I'm in a hurry, Lou; git a move on. I ain't got no time to be wastin' on you. Gimme Rockland at once."

In a few seconds there was a noise in the distance.

"Rockland? 'At you, Rockland? This is Marshal McAlpin at Georgetown. Gimme Prosecutor Thornton or the sheriff right away. Hell's a-poppin' down here. They's bin a murder committed, mebbe two. Hurry up, now."

Soon the marshal had the prosecutor on the wire, and hastily, disjointedly chopped out the facts as he knew them.

"I'll be right down," Thornton told him, somewhat excited himself. "I'll bring the sheriff and the coroner with me."

An hour and a half later a machine bearing four men came whirling into Georgetown, a great cloud of August dust eddying behind it. The machine stopped and Thornton alighted before the store and soft drink parlor conducted by Herman Matthews.

"Where's Marshal McAlpin?" he inquired of Herman.

"Over on the commons. A block down and a block toward the right."

The prosecutor, himself a young man; Dr. Carter, the coroner; "Bulldog" Dorgan, a friend of Thornton in

years gone by, now a Chicago detective, who was visiting his people at Rockland, and Sheriff Perry continued on till they found a cluster of men.

Marshal McAlpin saw them coming and with his best official decorum ordered the crowd back. The county authorities stepped into the circle and saw the body of a man about thirty lying on the ground.

"Who is he, Marshal?" the prosecutor asked.

"Harley, Mr. Thornton; George Harley," the marshal told him. "Clerk of the Lewis Commercial Bank." The marshal seemed to place emphasis upon "the Lewis Commercial Bank," as though it was an institution of which he and all Georgetown were proud.

"Examine him, please, Dr. Carter," the prosecutor instructed. "Now, Marshal McAlpin, tell what you know about it. And who is the other person that might have been murdered?"

The marshal told them that Harrison J. Lewis, president of the bank, was the other supposed victim. His body was at his home. But Marshal McAlpin could give them little information as to either case. All he knew was that Harley's body had been discovered on the common at dawn, just as they now saw it. No one had seen it placed there, and there had not been a shot or a cry or an unusual sound during the night, so far as he could learn. No one had thought to look for tracks, and the dust was now disturbed. And Mr. Lewis' body had been found in his automobile at his home.

"What do you find, doctor?" Thornton turned to the coroner.

"A slight abrasion at the base of the skull," was the answer. "That's all externally. I think his death was caused by a broken neck. Other than that I can discover nothing wrong."

Thornton ordered the body taken to the village undertaker's, and the party was moving away when a youth came running and announced that the Commercial Bank had been robbed. John Jacobsen, the cashier, had just opened up and found five thousand dollars missing, money which had recently been deposited by farmers who had sold their wheat.

"Things *are* happening around here," whistled the prosecutor. "Come on; we'll stop at the bank on the way to the Lewis home."

At the bank everything was in order. Mr. Jacobsen told the investigators he had found the doors locked as always, the non-time locking safe closed as it had been every morning, and papers and books undisturbed. But on opening the safe he discovered that five thousand dollars was missing.

A search in the bank revealed nothing; a search outside revealed nothing. There were no finger-prints to be seen on the safe, as Dorgan for one determined; the person who opened it evidently had exercised the greatest precaution. There was not even a track in the road that might have indicated a machine had been near the bank during the night.

"Did Harley have a key to the bank?" Thornton asked Mr. Jacobsen.

"Yes, he did; always had one. But you didn't find the money on his body, did you?"

"No; but we will look again."

"Did you find a pair of gloves of any kind a robber might have worn in opening the safe, Mr. Jacobsen?" Dorgan wanted to know.

"No, sir. Everything was left just as you see it when I found that the money was gone. I can't imagine what's happened."

"Well, I can't either," Thornton admitted. He turned to leave the bank, then stopped.

"Let me talk to you in private, Mr. Jacobsen." And with the middle-aged cashier, a man of faultless habits, he went into what had been Mr. Lewis' private office. They were closeted half an hour.

"Don't believe he is guilty or knows anything about the robbery or the deaths," Thornton confided to Dr. Carter, Sheriff Perry and Dorgan as they walked back to the undertaker's. "However, I guess it would be best to question him further later on."

They did not find the money on Harley. Neither did they find a pair of gloves. They found the bank key, but Thornton said that proved nothing.

They went on to the Lewis home, the most pretentious of any in the town of a thousand people. Mrs. Lewis was reclining upon a divan, weeping and hysterical. She told them Mr. Lewis was in his machine in front of the garage. They went to the rear and there saw the corpse of the middle-aged banker and leading business man of the community at the steering wheel of his car, his arms clasped around the wheel and his head resting upon them, as if he had fallen asleep.

Dr. Carter made another examination. There were no marks to indicate the banker had been the victim of foul play. Dr. Carter announced that he believed he died of heart disease.

When the four men returned to the house Mrs. Lewis, attended by an anxious neighbor woman, disposed them in chairs and returned to the divan.

"Would you tell us, Mrs. Lewis, what you know about this unfortunate occurrence?" the prosecutor began al-

most diffidently. "I suppose you know that the clerk of the bank also was found dead?"

She nodded her head, lips quivering.

"I realize it is a painful situation, Mrs. Lewis, and I will be brief. Where was Mr. Lewis last night in the car?"

"He left—left yesterday afternoon for Winton," she sobbed. "He told me he had business to look after there, and—and might be gone for the night."

At this Dorgan concentrated his steel blue eyes on Mrs. Lewis. She must have felt the intent scrutiny, for she suddenly looked toward him. As she did he perceived that she was a good-looking woman and could not be the age of her husband. There was a momentary alarm in her manner, which, however, fled as quickly as it had come. She took hold of herself and instead of being frightened and wary soon burst into a fresh fit of weeping. There was such an air of abject misery about her that even Dorgan seemed to be so moved that the glint in his eyes softened.

"He did not tell you what his business was?" Thornton was saying.

"No. Mr. Lewis nev—never told me about his business affairs."

"Try to be calm, Mrs. Lewis," the prosecutor counseled. "We will not bother you long. Did you hear Mr. Lewis return in the night or this morning?"

"No. I slept soundly all night and did not know he was—he was dead until I got up this morning."

"Tell us about the discovery."

"Well, I had arranged for a man to come today to mow the lawn," she went on more concertedly, the opportunity to tell what she knew apparently easing her mind. "Duggan—John Duggan. I had just come down to the kitchen; I do not have steady help and there was no one in the house but me. I was getting a bite for breakfast, making toast and putting the coffee on, when Mr.

Duggan came running and told me the machine was standing in the drive and Mr. Lewis was leaning over the wheel. He didn't know he was dead, but he thought there was something strange about it. I—I went out with him and—and tried to arouse Mr. Lewis. But—but I could not. Then I came back to the house and Mr. Duggan went for Marshal McAlpin. I—I—oh, it's awful, awful." She gave way to her grief again.

The prosecutor waited for her to regain control of herself before he pursued his questioning.

"Have you any idea of what might have become of the money, or caused Mr. Harley's death?"

"No."

"Was Mr. Lewis afflicted with heart trouble? Did he show any symptoms—grow weak, or faint?"

"Yes, yes, he had one or two attacks. Once in the bank he almost collapsed. Mr. Jacobsen knows about that."

"We'll not bother you much longer, Mrs. Lewis. There's just one thing more. Do you object to the body being held for a few days before burial? Perhaps a post-mortem may throw a little light on the case."

"No. I have no objections."

"Thank you. I'll do my best to clear this up. Two mysterious deaths here—it is very unusual. Good-day."

The party tiptoed from the house. Prosecutor Thornton said he was glad that was over.

As they walked away he asked Dorgan what he thought of the situation. Jim merely replied he didn't know what to think. It was obvious he did not wish to express an opinion so publicly.

Back at the bank, Thornton inquired of Mr. Jacobsen concerning Harley's antecedents and was informed by the cashier that he knew little of Harley's history. In fact, almost nothing. Mr. Lewis had engaged him in Cleveland,

he believed, although he could not be certain. Harley had talked of many places he had been, without attaching himself to any one particularly. He had come to Georgetown a little more than a year ago, and had always been on good terms with his employer. Mr. Jacobsen declared he was a very likable and upright young man, and resented any inference from the prosecutor that he might have been responsible for the disappearance of the five thousand dollars.

"Do you suppose he might have had friends in another city—Cleveland, for instance—who helped him rob the bank?" Dorgan pressed.

"Ah, no," Mr. Jacobsen replied, dismissing the thought. "He could not have done it. No, certainly not."

"Well, boys," Thornton said when they left the bank the second time, "the case resolves itself into this: Was Harley murdered, and who got the money? Evidently, as Dr. Carter says, Lewis died of heart disease in his car. He was getting well beyond fifty, and that's very probable. But something very unusual must have happened to Harley to break his neck, and the money of course did not walk away from the bank unassisted. What caused Harley's death and who took the money?—that's for us to find out. What's the answer, Dorgan?"

Jim flung up his hands in meaningless gesture.

After visiting the house where Harley had roomed and where they found the landlady in sincere mourning at Harley's death, the party returned to Rockland.

II.

"WELL, Mr. Sphinx, what do you make of it?" Thornton wanted to know when he was alone with Dorgan that evening in his office. "Has there

been a murder committed? Or two murders? What in your opinion should be the course of the commonwealth?"

The "Bulldog" did not answer at once, but stood looking out over the public square of Rockland where the autos were massed.

"We have cars nowadays where we used to have horses and buggies and hitchracks," he said irrelevantly.

"Yes," Bill answered.

"But we have people down here as always, the same people, with pretty much the same habits and beliefs and prejudices and loves and longings."

"Yes, I guess so."

"Human nature does not change a great deal regardless of the advance of civilization, does it?"

"No. But what's that got to do with Georgetown?"

"I don't know, Bill. Perhaps nothing. What do you think?"

Thornton sat staring at him and seemed to interpret his thoughts.

"You're wrong, Jim," he declared suddenly; "you're wrong."

"Well, perhaps I am. But that ancient situation—an old husband, a young wife and a young man. Why, the man who would overlook that angle of this case would be a fool. An absolute fool, Bill; an absolute fool."

"How old do you say she is, Jim?"

"A little over thirty. Do I miss it far?"

"No, I guess not. I recall that she married him five or six years ago, and she could not have been very old then. She's just two or three years younger than you and I."

"What were the circumstances—the reason, if I might put it that way?"

"No particular reason, to my knowledge. Probably because she had no other offer of marriage, Jim. Such things do happen, you know."

"That's probably true. Plain sort of woman, isn't she?"

"Yes, plain. Too plain, Jim, to bear out what you're hinting at. That's my idea. Why, I know her as I know every one else in the county, perhaps a little better than some, and I know she has been very dutiful. Her nature to be so. It's rather ridiculous, Dorgan, to jump at conclusions like that. Preposterous! A church worker, the Associated Charities of the village, the personification of kindness. No, Jim, it could not be."

"But you do not intend to take it for granted, do you, Bill? You're surely going to investigate her thoroughly. If I may offer a suggestion, I'd keep the coroner's verdict open for a while, and—and put her through a severe examination."

Thornton thrummed his desk with a letter opener. His face flushed.

"Look here, Jim," he said, shaking the instrument at Dorgan with the manner he might use in addressing a jury. "I've a little sense of human nature as well as you. You have worked among people where that sort of thing exists. It does not exist in this county. It does not, I tell you!"

"Well, that's the chivalrous way of looking at it."

"I've got some sense of human nature, as I said," Thornton continued, his eyes narrowing, "and I insist that I know an honest and decent woman when I see one. I did not indicate it today, but I have known Helen Lewis for a great many years. We once went to school together down in the country before I met you. That girl was wholesome, a romping, open-souled sort of person; that woman is wholesome, and decent, today."

"But, Bill, it is the wholesome woman that often turns out to be the most unwholesome. She's forced to it. The lack of attention drives her to seek attention. Haven't I seen it proven scores of times? I wasn't born yesterday."

There was a recalcitrant note in his voice.

"Yes, that's the fine professional way of looking at it. But it's the brutal, cold way, too. Why, Dorgan, I'd as soon cut off that little finger as to consider such a thing seriously. What do we know to indicate such an amour as you insinuate, getting down to brass tacks? What evidence have we got that such an affair ever existed? None, absolutely none. They were never seen together, and Harley very, very seldom was at the Lewis home. Jacobsen told me privately he knew that neither had been farther away from Georgetown than Rockland within the year. Why, man, there's not a scintilla of fact to back you up!"

Dorgan laughed softly.

"Very well, my dear sir," Thornton flung at him. "But perhaps you can explain the disappearance of the money on your hypothesis? Possibly the five thousand had an affinity."

"Oh, I won't quarrel about it, Bill. Of course I cannot explain at this stage how the money disappeared. But somebody who had a key to the bank and knew the safe combination must have got it. That's almost a foregone conclusion."

"Yes. But where did it go? Three persons had keys to the bank—Harley, Jacobsen and Lewis. I think you will agree with me that Jacobsen may almost be eliminated from suspicion. However, I intend to have accountants go over the books and affairs of the bank generally. Just before you came in tonight I had the bank at Winton on the phone to see if I could find any clew to Lewis' taking the money there. But there was none. It was some real estate business that took him to Winton, I learned, and there was no money passed. That brings us down to Harley. If he stole the money, what did he do with it? It was not at the house

where he roomed, as you know our investigation proved. If he took it, would he hide it, knowing that the theft of so large an amount would be discovered immediately? And he mailed nothing, nor telegraphed. There is the possibility that he had outside help. Jacobsen spoke of his having come from Cleveland; at least he thought so. He might have engineered the haul and had a gang from Cleveland to aid him. We'll get in touch with the police there and in other cities and have them on the lookout. There are several possibilities—plausibilities, Jim, you might say—but nothing definite. I think you will agree with me, that it is a very deep mystery to which the key is not visible. So what's the answer, Jim?"

"The woman, Bill."

Prosecutor Thornton threw up his hands in disgust.

"Bah! Two bahs! You're crazy. There's nothing to proceed on, man!"

"There's what the reporters call the third degree."

"Nothing doing, nothing doing!" Bill expostulated. "Whenever I have to become a bulldozer to accomplish my ends, particularly with a woman like Helen Lewis, why, somebody else can be prosecutor!"

"Then you don't intend to do it?"

"No, I do not."

"I'm afraid I can't be of any more help to you, Bill."

"Jim, it's said that whenever a man offers a wager to support his position, he has nothing more worthy to offer. But I'd stake my life on Helen Lewis' fidelity, and I'm not going to besmirch her name."

"I admire your chivalry, Bill, but not your professional acumen. I think I'll be going."

"All right, Jim. Time will tell. It usually does in such vital matters."

"Bulldog" Dorgan departed, cursing under his breath such stupidity.

III.

NEXT morning Jacobsen sent in to the prosecutor a letter he had found among Mr. Lewis' papers. Thornton called Dorgan at the home of his parents and asked if he would like to take a trip into the country. Dorgan accepted the invitation and they drove fifteen miles beyond Georgetown into the hills bordering the Ohio River.

The letter, written in a scrawling and illiterate style, and signed by George Morris, had been posted seven days before. It was very short and to the point, being, in fact, a threat that if Mr. Lewis did not restore five thousand dollars which Morris claimed he was entitled to, he, Morris, would take steps to get it back.

With the letter in hand Thornton, accompanied by Dorgan, climbed a rock strewn hillside to the Morris house, a place badly in need of repair. It was patently not the home of a prosperous farmer.

George, a doddering old man, was amiable enough to his callers. He had not heard Mr. Lewis was dead, but was frank to say he was glad of it. He calmly admitted he had written to Mr. Lewis, explaining that some months before the bank had foreclosed without notice on an adjoining piece of land and sold it for five thousand dollars to a neighbor. He went on to say that following that his wife had died and now he was alone on his almost worthless patch of twenty acres or so. He said the foreclosure had brought on his wife's death, and if Mr. Lewis had been lenient a little longer he would have been able to pay out.

"He got his just deserts, Lewis did," the old man concluded in frenzied voice. "The ol' skinflint!"

"How did you intend to recover from Lewis—what steps had you planned to

take, like you mentioned in your letter?" Thornton questioned.

"Well, now, I don't like to say, for mebbe I will want to do somethin' yit," Morris countered. "But I never had a mind to kill him."

"Where were you night before last?"

"Up t' th' store."

"Can you prove it?"

"Yes, sir; 'deed I can."

And he did. Thornton and Dorgan learned from the proprietor that the old man had been there until nearly ten o'clock. Others corroborated this, and one man said he had ridden home with old George, helped him put up his horse and had walked on to his own home.

"Bum hunch," Dorgan told Thornton. "He had nothing to do with it."

"We'll see, Jim."

But on looking over the two bony animals Morris had in his tumbledown barn, the prosecutor decided that neither was capable of making thirty miles in a night. Besides, it seemed ridiculous, as Dorgan told him, to assume that old George, doddering as he was, had enough ingenuity to encompass such a robbery.

An unavailing search of the house and the barn for the money convinced Thornton that George Morris was guiltless.

The third day an inquest was held and the verdict left open. The fourth day Mr. Lewis and Harley were buried after an analysis of the vital organs of both had been made and developed nothing. Both were placed in the same plot in the Georgetown cemetery.

Police of Cleveland and other cities were unable to find anything to assist Thornton. A search among banking people at Cleveland failed to throw any light on Harley's past. Several times Dorgan sought to convince Thornton that Mrs. Lewis should be grilled, but each time he met with rebuff. Thornton said he would take her word that

she knew nothing about how the two men came to their deaths.

Finally, after ten days of useless rummaging, the prosecutor instructed the coroner to return a verdict of death from a broken neck, cause unknown, in the case of Harley, and from heart disease in the case of the banker. He had been unable to develop a lead worthy of consideration. The money was gone; if Harley and Lewis had died from unlawful causes, those causes probably would never be known.

Jim Dorgan returned to Chicago. But he did not forget the Georgetown mystery. He rarely ever forgot anything, and never wilfully cast a criminal subject from his mind. He almost took it as a personal affront that Thornton had disregarded his opinion. Relations had become a little strained between the prosecutor and himself toward the end of his visit, and it rankled in him that such a mystery should go unsolved and that Thornton should adopt what to him seemed a foolish attitude. It hurt his professional pride.

IV.

CHICAGO was in the throes of a crime wave. Murders, robberies and petty thieving were rampant. The order went out one night for a roundup. Every person of known criminal proclivities was to be brought in to make an accounting.

The fine-meshed seine caught, among others, "Limping Lizzie," who had a string of aliases as long as a thoroughbred's pedigree. Lizzie, known of old as a clever dip, was dragged from a cozily furnished apartment in the Twenties on the south side. The detectives who brought her in judged she must have been getting in some extremely profitable work recently, and they told Chief Burke so.

"Why, chief, that woman's got swell

furniture and rugs and curtains galore in her apartment," Mercer reported. "Limpin' Lizzie certainly has not been loafin'. Now, have you, E-liz-a-beth?" He turned to the girl with mock seriousness.

E-liz-a-beth was indignant. Her respectability was outraged.

"I have not been doing anything of the sort," she answered hotly. "And you know I have not. You know you haven't got a thing on me. I've been bothering no one for—oh, well, for a long time."

The chief laughed. So did the two detectives.

"Where'd you get all those swell rags you're wearing?" Burke demanded.

"Why, I got an inheritance about nine months ago," she declared.

"That's good," Mercer roared. "You're there, Lizzie. Who was he and how did you work it?"

"You nut!" the girl cried, in sincere anger. "You nut! Let me go! I haven't done anything to be hauled in here for." She was talking loudly, in righteous indignation, and not in the suave, sweet way that had been hers when she had had dealings with the police on previous occasions.

Dorgan was attracted by her outburst and came and stood in the doorway of Burke's office. He listened to her appeals.

"What's the matter, Lizzie?" he finally interrupted.

"Your friends here are trying to get me to admit I've been picking pockets lately, and it's not so. They won't believe me when I tell them that I inherited some money recently. I have a letter to prove it." She drew herself up defiantly.

"Well, where's the letter?" the chief wanted to know.

"I have it all right. It's out at the flat."

"Take her out there, Dorgan, and see if she's telling the truth. I guess you will be able to tell. Use your discretion. I have another assignment for Mercer and Kelly."

Dorgan and the girl walked out. On the way to the elevated station Jim noticed that she did not limp as she had the last time he had seen her and got her out of an affair in which he believed she really had been falsely accused.

"What's happened, anyway?" he inquired.

"An operation, Mr. Dorgan," she said, assuming an air of importance. "I'm somebody now. I could afford an operation. Doctor took a bone from my foot." She stopped and held back her skirt so that he might see the result. Whereas the ankle had been enlarged and awkward before, it was now virtually of regular proportions.

"It'll hurt your business, won't it, Lizzie? You won't be able to work on their sympathy any more." Jim spoke with an air of camaraderie which sometimes obtains between hunter and hunted.

Lizzie did not answer.

At the flat she brought out the letter and showed it to Dorgan. As she did so her eyes became misty.

"The money was from my brother, George Harley," she said throatily. "He died last summer."

Dorgan looked at her quickly.

"Where?" he asked crisply.

"Down in Ohio somewhere, I guess. Here, read it."

The letter, dated October 15, was from a Cincinnati bank and addressed to Elizabeth Harley. It merely stated that a client bank in Ohio had requested that a draft payable to her be forwarded by registered mail, the money being the estate that had been left by her brother, George Harley, who had died suddenly. She would be able, it added, to cash it at any bank.

Dorgan read it and his eyes glowed.

"Lizzie, you remember you told me last summer that if you could do me a favor, you would?"

"Yes."

"Well, can I have this letter for a while if I agree to return it to you?"

"And let me get run in without any proof of what I tell the bulls?"

"The chief will take my word that you're on the square."

"What do you want with it?"

"I can't tell you that. But I'll promise to return it. You know that I usually keep my promises."

"All right, if you promise. But I want it back sure."

"You'll get it. By the way, what is your real name, Lizzie?"

"That's it—Harley. That's the truth, Jim."

Dorgan that night requested and was granted three days leave without pay.

V.

JIM DORGAN was back in the office of Prosecutor Thornton at Rockland. He presented the letter he brought with him to the prosecutor, who read it over slowly.

"Are you content to let the case rest now, Bill?" Jim asked.

"No, I guess not, Jim. Perhaps you had the right hunch after all. I don't suppose that old Jacobsen would hardly have sent that money without the knowledge of the owner of the bank, who now happens to be Mrs. Lewis. We'll go out and see her at once."

The Dorgan car drove up to the Georgetown home of the widow. The prosecutor and Dorgan alighted and were met at the door by Mrs. Lewis. They were startled by her appearance—a woman aged years in months, her hair graying. She hesitated a moment, then opened the door to them. She asked them to be seated.

Thornton went to his subject at once. He produced the letter, passed it to her and asked if she understood what it meant. Mrs. Lewis paled to her hair and seemed to be on the point of denial. Then her manner changed suddenly and she was at ease.

"Yes, I know what it means, Mr. Thornton," she said. "It—it was sent at my instruction. How did you get it?"

Thornton explained how Dorgan had come into possession of it, and recalled that Dorgan had been present last summer.

"Will you tell us what the letter means—how it all happened, Mrs. Lewis?" he added.

"Yes, I will be glad to. Do you know, Will," she said, taking up his name of school days, "I am glad that you came today. Probably you will not believe it, but I am. I have thought very, very seriously of seeing you about it, and I would have in time. You do not know how a terrible secret like I have harbored can burn its way into one's soul. I have been miserable, and yet I have not quite had the courage to make a clean breast of it. So I'm glad you're here. At last I can tell."

"Yes, Mrs. Lewis—Helen—I can understand," Thornton assured her. "Tell us everything and you will feel better."

"I had that money sent to Miss Harley," she went on deliberately, "because her brother had told me she was a cripple; and he had expressed a hope that some time he might be able to supply her with funds for an operation. He had talked to me about her, and—and I thought I should do it. That money, Will, was stolen from the bank."

Dorgan glanced toward Thornton victoriously. The prosecutor's eyes showed plainly that he disliked to believe it.

"I'm going to tell you the whole truth, Will," Mrs. Lewis was saying. "I'm going to start at the beginning and bare my soul. And if I am to blame for anything I am not going to ask for mercy. If I have done anything for which I should atone, I want to atone. I did not tell the whole truth last summer, but there seemed to be no other way out.

"You know, Will, about my marriage, and that Mr. Lewis was so much older. I didn't think I should marry him, but my parents urged me to. And, I'll be frank to say, Will, there did not seem to be another prospect for me. We were not happy; it was impossible for us to be. The difference in our ages was too great.

"Then Mr. Harley came here to work in the bank. From Columbus, it was. Mr. Lewis had inquired of a bank there for a competent man when his business got so heavy. I did not know anything much about Mr. Harley; neither did Mr. Lewis. But he was competent, likable and congenial—and he was young. There's no use of hiding anything now. I think it all must have had its beginning when Mr. Lewis invited him to the house. We became good friends. You can see how it would be so—I had been cooped up so long without proper associates. He was only here a few times. Once at dinner he told Mr. Lewis and myself about his sister. He was very careful in his attentions to me at the house, but when I would go to the bank I saw in his eyes what any woman could not fail to see. I felt sort of guilty, but—but it thrilled me, too.

"Oh, I know it was not right, but I was so lonesome, so lonesome, Will. I was not in love with him, I am sure, or I would not have done what I did later. But I suppose his admiration enthralled me. Perhaps you will understand that—I can't explain it more

fully." She paused and showed signs of giving away to her emotions.

Thornton and Dorgan gave her sympathetic attention and she proceeded.

"One day he said to me at the bank, 'You are very unhappy, Helen,' and because it was true and because his voice and eyes were so tender, I began to cry. I was not used to tenderness. I hurried from the bank.

"The next day I had a note from him through the mail. It simply said, 'Will you forgive me?'

"After that I stayed away from the bank, and one evening a week later he called me on the phone.

"'Did you get my note?' he asked.

"'Yes,' I said.

"'What is the answer?' he wanted to know.

"'What could it be but yes,' I told him.

"'All right,' he said. 'Tonight.'

"That was all. The tenseness of his voice made me uneasy; the 'Tonight' worried me. But I told myself I had misunderstood it for 'Good night.'

"Mr. Lewis had driven over to Winton to attend to some business or other. He said he might not be back until the next day. I suppose Mr. Harley knew it.

"I went to bed early. At eleven o'clock the doorbell rang. I slipped into my dressing gown and went down to answer it. It was—was him!

"Well, he wanted to know why I was not ready as I had promised, and kept saying over and over the train went at twelve and we would miss it if we did not hurry. I was so amazed, so terror-stricken, that I made no remonstrance when he came in and closed the door. I told him I did not understand what he meant by such action, when I finally gathered my senses.

"'Aren't you going with me, Helen?' he demanded.

"'Are you mad?' I asked.

"'I guess so, Helen,' he said. 'Mad with love of you. Hurry, Helen, for we are going away to happiness.' That is just the way he put it."

Again she paused, and her eyes fell to the floor. She presented a sad picture, as she struggled to repress her emotion.

"I finally got the straight of it. After the first note he had sent me another, proposing that we go away together. It did not come until the next day—he had taken the precaution to mail it in another town. He pleaded I should go anyway because of his love for me, and—and would not leave. He tried to take me in his arms. I ran upstairs to escape him, and he started to follow.

"Then I heard a car in the drive and—and I knew Mr. Lewis had come home. It was a terrible moment. I stopped on the stairs and begged Mr. Harley to go. Finally he seemed to comprehend the situation and turned to go down the stairs.

"But it was too late. The car stopped outside the garage and it seemed only a second before I heard Mr. Lewis on the rear porch. Mr. Harley had taken only two or three steps when Mr. Lewis opened the kitchen door. He came in quickly, wondering, I suppose, why there was a light in the hall. Maybe he heard us.

"Mr. Harley started to run for the front door. A rug slipped under him and he fell, striking his head on the floor. His neck must have been broken that way. I darted on upstairs. I did not dare stop. I hurried into my room and lay down. Then in a minute I heard a gasp from Mr. Lewis and—and a dull sound. I waited for perhaps thirty minutes, not knowing what to do. At last I crept downstairs.

"The hall light had been jostled out.

I stumbled over something. I found the light and turned it on. Mr. Lewis' body lay over Mr. Harley's. I suppose Mr. Lewis had died from the shock, an act of providence." The tears welled in her eyes.

"That's about all of the story," she sobbed. "Except, that after I had stared at them in dumb agony for what seemed an age, I came to realize they must not be found here. Frantically I paced up and down the hall, not knowing what to do. Then a heaven-sent idea came to me.

"I carried Mr. Lewis out and placed him in his car, just as he was found next morning. Then I half carried, half dragged Mr. Harley to the common, dodging in and out of the shadows. It was a moonlight night, and it seemed to me a thousand pairs of eyes were watching from each window. He was heavy, but I did not seem to notice that. My muscles were deadened with fear. Then I stole home to my misery like a hunted animal."

She lay back against the divan, utterly weary and almost limp from her recital.

"But what of the money?" Dorgan managed to ask.

"That's another miserable part of it," she faltered. "Of course he took it—to go away on. I noticed it in his pocket, it made such a bulge. Something told me it was not his, and I felt I owed it to him to protect his name, when it was partly my fault that he did such a wild thing. So I took it. I remembered what he had told me about his sister. He had given me her address so that I might get in touch with her should anything happen to him. So I sent it to her. I went to Cincinnati personally and told the bank there to send it on, saying that it came from a bank in Ohio.

"That is all, Will. What is to become of me? Am I damned forever?" The

tears were flowing down her cheeks.

"No, Helen, no. It has been cleared up to my satisfaction, and the state will not prosecute," Thornton freely assured her. "In fact, there is nothing to prosecute on, since it is a private bank, and no one has lost anything but you. And what a terrible story! Perhaps you did not do right in concealing it so long, Helen. But I can understand, and I want to extend my sympathy. And we will go at once, for I do not want to intrude longer upon your sorrow."

He rose, walked over and took her hand. A silent clasp, a homage to a sorrowing woman whom he had known

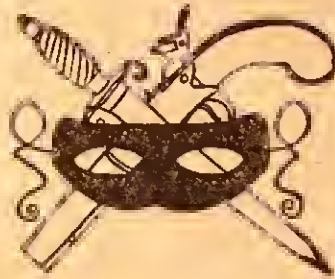
as a romping schoolgirl—and he walked to the door.

Jim Dorgan's face was a puzzle to see as he shook hands with Helen Lewis. There was an admixture of victory and defeat.

Outside, when they were seated and the machine was moving off, Bill turned to his friend. He could not help gloating a little.

"Didn't I tell you, Jim? Didn't I tell you that Helen Lewis would not wittingly be a party to such a thing?"

"We both win—and we both lose," Dorgan the "Bulldog" answered evasively. "But I'm satisfied. She's a good woman, Bill, a good woman."



Told in Glass

By C. S. Montanye

THE neighbors on Christopher Square called him Old Man Johnson. He had a little basement shop where he dealt in second hand automobile parts. He lived in the rear of the store and the Square knew him as an inventor. It did not know what he invented, but it was accustomed to seeing a light in the store at all hours. If one looked down into the black areaway they could see the old man at work among his tools, his ragged gray beard drooping over his bench.

One day Christopher Square hummed with news concerning Old Man Johnson.

Big Harry Westley, the King of Con Men, discussed the news with Lefty Blumfeld, alias Morrison Taylor, over a table in the front room of the West Side Social Club, located at the end of the Square. Westley was large, florid and impressive. Crookdom respected his genius. It was said that Westley could cut Central Park up into building lots and sell them for cash. He had served two jail terms, but had lost none of his nerve or pompous exterior.

Lefty Blumfeld, alias Morrison Taylor, was undersized. He was built along the lines of a gorilla. He had a low, bulging forehead and beady black eyes. His bull neck was short and thick. His hands were covered with coarse black hair. They were gnarled and pitted from laboratory work. He made nitro-glycerine for petermen and blasters when he was not out on a job himself. He had done a stretch of six years in the State penitentiary and was

as rapacious and merciless as a coiled cobra.

"Did you hear the news about Old Man Johnson?" Westley inquired, lighting a fat cigar with a flourish.

Blumfeld tossed off three fingers of underground rye whiskey. He dried his lips on the back of his hand.

"No. What about him?"

The big con man tilted back his chair and chuckled.

"Everyone is talking about Old Man Johnson. He sold an invention to some big company up the state. He's been paid ten thousand dollars in advance royalties. Charlie Hill saw the check and so it's not air. The old geezer has cleaned up. Ten grands—I guess that's rotten."

Blumfeld ran his finger around the inside rim of his whiskey glass.

"What's the invention?" he asked after a pause.

Westley shook his head and shrugged.

"Search me. Nobody seems to know. Charlie Hill asked him, but Johnson said it was a secret. It must be something good or he wouldn't have got such dough."

Blumfeld nodded moodily.

"Yes, it must be," he said.

Westley flicked the ash from the end of his cigar and chuckled again.

"Ten thousand dollars," he observed reflectively, "is a lot of dough. I'll have to wander up to Moy Ling's after awhile and smoke a couple of pipes of scamish. Poppy makes me dream clever schemes. I was full of hop the time I took that Florida lawyer for his currency kick. Old Man John-

son isn't used to sudden wealth. I'll dream out a way to separate him from his cush. When I get it I'll buy you the best dinner in town, Lefty."

"Like hell!" Blumfeld grunted.

Westley smiled and looked at his watch. He stood up and pulled down his waistcoat. He placed seventy-five cents on the table to pay for the liquor he had consumed and fingered his closely shaven chin.

"Well, I've got to be moving. Be good to yourself and be leary of the red-necks. I've just got about six minutes to grab a short."

He nodded affably and moved away. Through the front windows of the club Blumfeld saw him stride briskly across the square. The nitro-glycerine expert sat stiffly still. Ten thousand dollars! He hardly knew there was so much money in the world. And it was in the possession of a doddering inventor who lived in a mean cellar!

Blumfeld's beady eyes glittered. When he considered the magnitude of the sum he felt dazed. For a long interval he sat with expressionless face and staring eyes. After a time he got up. He took a few steps toward the door, returned and picked up the seventy-five cents Big Harry Westley had laid on the table. He shoved it into his pocket, deciding he needed it more than the waiter.

Slouching out of the club, he descended the front steps and stepped onto the cracked pavement of Christopher Square. The late September afternoon was dying in a conflagration of sunset fire. The sky was brazen with raw scarlet, amethyst and silver-and-purple. Lights were winking in the waterfront rigging, a block distant. The river was boisterous with the voice of sirens and the shrill of whistles. The wraith of evening shook out her black draperies that were pinned with stars.

Blumfeld turned east. He walked two blocks. He came in sight of the building in the cellar of which Old Man Johnson maintained his shop. He saw the inventor's ancient sign hanging from its metal stanchion like a one-legged acrobat. Drawing close to the areaway, Blumfeld leaned over and peered down. Somewhere in the shop below an oil lamp burned. In its uncertain radiance Blumfeld observed the stooped figure of the proprietor.

Turning to the iron stairway that led steeply down into the basement, Blumfeld drew his lips back over his teeth and smiled. He descended the steps and opened the front door. He entered and closed it after him. The shop was warm and stuffy with the odor of paint and grease. Blumfeld hardly noticed it. His quick gaze darted to the work-bench over which Old Man Johnson hung. He saw the inventor was old and feeble. The eyes of the man were blue and faded. His skin was wrinkled like yellow parchment. He wore a disreputable old pair of oil-stained trousers, a collarless flannel shirt that exposed his turkey neck and a pencil-stuffed vest held together by one button.

"You got a second hand drive shaft for a Brown and Blue taxi?" Blumfeld said, as the inventor looked up.

Old Man Johnson shook his head.

"No, I haven't," he said in a thin husky voice.

Blumfeld allowed his gaze to wander about the place.

"Got any gears or transmission parts?"

The inventor shook his white head again.

"No, I don't think I have. All the parts are piled up in the corner over there. I'm going out of business, so if you find anything you can use you can have it at your own price."

He indicated a heap of metal stacked

up in one corner. Blumfeld shuffled across to it. He pawed idly over it. While he did this he plumbed the room with his beady eyes. He made a mental photograph of the way the shop was arranged, of a single window that opened on to an alley running past it, and of a door that went into what was presumably the living quarters of the inventor.

When he had observed all that interested him, Blumfeld straightened up and turned his back on the heap of metal.

"Find anything?" Old Man Johnson asked.

Blumfeld shook his head.

"No. I'll come around next week. Maybe you'll have a shaft picked up by then."

The inventor smiled faintly.

"I won't be here next week. I'm selling out. I'm going out of business. I'm leaving for Rochester on Monday. I'm an inventor and I only kept this little place here until I struck oil."

Blumfeld allowed himself to look impressed.

"Is that right? So you struck oil. I guess that means you sold an invention. You must have knocked out large kale if you're going to Rochester."

The interest of his caller appeared to please the old man. He wiped his hands on a piece of cotton waste and put some tobacco in the bowl of his black pipe.

"It took me twenty years to perfect my invention," he explained, with a touch of pride. "Many times I thought I had made it, only to discover some hidden flaw. People I told about it said it couldn't be done and thought I was crazy to even try it. Three months ago I knew I had triumphed. I put the invention to every possible test and it made good. I applied for a patent and sent my work to a big manufacturing concern in Rochester. They tested

it for two months and then agreed to purchase the right to manufacture it. They sent me ten thousand dollars and a contract. I'm going to Rochester, as I said, to take charge of the making of them."

Blumfeld, receiving verification of Big Harry's statement, felt satisfaction tingling keenly within him. He had almost believed that it was opium that put the words in the mouth of the big con man.

"So you got ten thousand dollars," he murmured. "That's a lot of money. You want to hold on to it tight. I guess you know the Square is a pretty tough place. Don't let no one bunk the jack away from you, or stick you up for it."

Old Man Johnson looked serious.

"Never fear, I won't. I have it hidden where no one can find it. It's safe."

Blumfeld smiled.

"That's the eye! Hang onto it. I'm sorry you ain't got what I'm after. Good luck to you when you get to Rochester."

At the door Blumfeld stopped, seized by a sudden thought.

"By the way," he said, "what was it you invented?"

The inventor picked up a file from the bench.

"It's a secret," he replied slowly. "It's a secret until it's put on the market—"

II

At eleven o'clock Blumfeld emerged from the east side stuss house where he had run his purloined seventy-five cents up to six dollars. A pleasant sense of success swam in his blood. His good fortune was an omen that fickle Luck smiled upon him. On such a night as this he might conquer in any deed in which he figured or any endeavor he applied his hand to.

At the corner of the street he traversed he boarded a surface car. He rode twelve blocks and transferred to a cross-town car. The second car took him as far as Harrigan Avenue, where he alighted. He continued east, treading a labyrinth of side streets that emptied like sewers along the waterfront. Where the river's breath was damp, foul and cold, Blumfeld turned south. A few minutes later he entered Christopher Square by its west termination.

He passed the social club where he had sat and talked with Big Harry. The strains of jazz crept out through lighted windows. Evidently a dance was in progress. He wondered if it was all right to stop off for a hooker of illicit whiskey. He decided not to and quickened his step as if to outpace temptation. When the ten thousand dollars of Old Man Johnson's was his he could buy a hundred cases of hootch. He could fill a tub full of rye and bathe in it if he so desired.

The pleasant stream of imagination he floated down emptied him into the bayou of Broken Dreams. He shook himself as he sighted his destination. The hanging sign of the inventor loomed before him—the black area-way of the basement shop which was as dark as the inside of a pocket. Blumfeld made sure his movements were not being observed and squatted down. He looked into the shop as far as he could but saw no trace of any light.

Arising, he surveyed the Square. Music still seeped out from the club. No loiterer shuffled through the shadows. He descended the areaway stairs. The door he had opened earlier in the evening confronted him. Quick inspection told Blumfeld it was locked and bolted on the inside in such a way as to make forcing it impossible. He muttered a curse and crept down the area-

way. He climbed a fence and dropped down into an alley that fringed the building. He came upon the single window of the shop and drew a breath of satisfaction when he found the top pane was lowered an inch or two. It was the work of a minute to draw the lower sash up, swing quietly across the sill and step down onto the floor of the store.

So much accomplished without mishap, Blumfeld grew cautious. Old Man Johnson was an inventor. It was likely he had rigged up some device that would make known the presence of an intruder. Blumfeld knew he would have to be wary or he would stumble into a snare. He opened the blade of a large, heavy knife and felt his way to the door that opened into the living rooms beyond. Twice he stubbed his foot on some bit of metal lying about. He reached the door without accident otherwise and felt about the frame. At first he discovered nothing, then as he dug his nails into the plaster he found the presence of a number of fine, silk-covered wires. He cut them one at a time and dropped a hand to the knob of the door.

It opened at his touch with scarce a creak.

Blumfeld passed into stark blackness perfumed with the reek of a kerosene lamp. Its odor took him carefully across the room. He discovered the location of the lamp and felt its chimney. Its warmth told him it had been extinguished only a short time.

Blumfeld turned slowly. He must learn if this room was the bedchamber of the inventor or not. He longed to kindle a match, but knew its glare would betray him if Johnson was awake. He began to step forward, laying his hand against the furniture it encountered. He touched a chair and a small table, but they told him nothing. He had no way of knowing where

he was until his knees suddenly came in contact with something cold and hard and investigation caused him to expel a breath of relief. His exploring hands felt a mattress and a blanket.

While he considered the next move, Blumfeld stiffened cautiously. The bed creaked with the weight of some one turning over in it. After what seemed an eternity, a thin, husky voice came out of the staring murk.

"I have a fully loaded revolver covering you! I will—"

Blumfeld did not wait to hear the rest of it. With a snarl he flung himself forward. He crashed against a figure that fell back with a soft cry, a cry that was abruptly shut off by the grip of his fingers. Something hard clattered to the floor with a dull, metallic ring. Wisps of beard scratched Blumfeld's face. With his free hand he ripped a piece from the blanket, wadded it together and stuffed it into the man's mouth, forcing his jaws open and digging a knee into his stomach so that no scream might awake discordant echoes. When he had neatly gagged his victim he ended weak struggles with a vicious blow and using other strips of the blanket bound Johnson's wrists and ankles tightly together.

Stepping away from the bed Blumfeld struck a match.

He turned up the wick of the oil lamp and lighted it. The room boasted two windows and both displayed drawn shades. It was sparsely furnished as a bedroom, containing a bureau with a mirror, table, chair and trunk. Blumfeld dropped down on the top of the trunk. He dug out the stub of a cigarette from his pocket and after kindling it looked casually at the trussed up man on the bed. He grinned when the faded blue eyes met his bravely and steadily.

"I came back," Blumfeld said. "I came back to get them ten thousand

smackers you were bragging about. If you come clean with me you won't get hurt. If you try any funny stuff you'll never go to Rochester. You'll go to a place where money ain't no use. Nod your head if you understand."

The inventor nodded. Blumfeld picked up the revolver from the floor and pocketed it.

"Are you ready to tell me where the money is at? Nod yes or no."

The old man inclined his head. Blumfeld crossed to him and leaned over.

"I'm going to slip the gag out of your peep. If you open your trap to yell I'll cave in your conk!"

He removed the makeshift gag and the inventor licked his lips.

"C'mon, spit out the dope!" Blumfeld ordered impatiently.

"I will tell you nothing!" the old man said huskily. "What it took me twenty years to earn I will share with no one! No matter what you do to me no information will pass my lips! I will meet my fate unafraid! And I will know that you cannot escape the consequences of your crime! The work of my hand and the child of my brain will reach out, even from the grave, and overtake you!"

With a snarl Blumfeld jammed the gag back into the inventor's mouth. He pushed the old man savagely back among the pillows and struck him again with his fist. For a few minutes he sat silent, his face dark with thought. At length he stood up, slapped his thigh with an exclamation and walked to the lamp. He opened the blade of his heavy knife and laid it across the mouth of the chimney, looking back at the cot with a wide grin.

"Maybe a little burning on the soles of your feet will make you loosen up! I'll torture you before I croak you, and even if you don't tell me what I want to know I'll find out! I'll

turn these rooms upside down!"

He lifted the knife from the chimney and saw that its blade had turned white-hot. He wrapped his handkerchief around the handle and with a single move drew the sheets and blankets off the bed. . . .

III

THREE days later as Blumfeld slouched out of the east side lodging-house where he roomed, a man stepped across the pavement and laid a hand on his arm. Synchronously another man stepped out of the passing crowd and caught hold of his left arm, moving it up and out.

Before Blumfeld could draw a breath, something cold encircled each wrist—a sharp click sounded.

"You are wanted, Lefty!" the first man said briefly. "Charge of bumping off Old Man Johnson, the inventor, down on Christopher Square last week!"

Blumfeld lifted his face, his lips drawn back over his yellow teeth.

"You're crazy with the heat!" he snarled. "I haven't been on Christopher Square in two weeks. I've been away. I've been in Chi—"

The second man smiled.

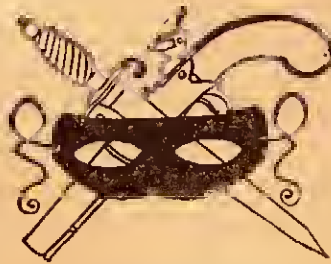
"There is no use of lying, Lefty. We have Old Man Johnson's invention down at headquarters. It showed us who croaked him and told us who to look for. We've got the man—you are he!"

Blumfeld licked his lips.

"What invention are you talking about?"

His first captor exchanged a look with his companion.

"Something that's going to stand this country on its ear when it hears about it," he answered. "The old man invented a mirror. He had one in the bureau in his bedroom. It's a mirror that retains the reflection of the last person who passes before it." . . .



The Half-Asleep Girl

By William H. Kofoed

I

THE street was squalid, dirty. On either side a row of rickety frame houses, leaning like drunken sailors one upon the other, warned idle trespassers of the character of the neighborhood. The few people who traversed it now in the autumn twilight walked quickly and with many a furtive, sidewise glance, as though in some ancient land of gnomes and ogres, where, behind every wall, lurked an unknown horror.

That is, all but young Fleming Metcalf Knibbs. It is doubtful that Knibbs could achieve the furtive if his life depended on it. He was one of those straightforward chaps who insist that black is black, and, even though a sizable check be the inducement, refuse to call it gray. Of course, in reality, no check could possibly prove an inducement to young Knibbs, as his private fortune was known to flirt with seven figures; but the comparison is none the less illuminating on that account.

Nor was he without a sense of humor, or of balance: humor enough to enjoy all phases of life, balance enough to realize that not in money alone does one find happiness.

But his humor bordered on the romantic and adventurous, almost indiscreetly so. He was given to prowling in little-frequented quarters, and every now and again he would get himself in trouble, which he enjoyed hugely.

Moving along the sordid thoroughfare, his ever-curious eyes taking in its details, young Knibbs came at length to a house more rickety, if possible,

than the rest, whose door was at that moment slowly opening. In the shadow he glimpsed white-stockinged ankles and slippers below a dark skirt.

Knibbs was passing as the girl descended the steps. Her movements were so softly gliding as to be almost ethereal, and, visualizing her as emerging from a haze, he recalled a famous picture of a wood nymph shrouded in twilight mist. At first her face was indistinct, then suddenly he caught it, like a ray of light, and stood transfixed by its strange charm.

And now he saw her quite unromantically catch the heel of one slipper on the edge of a step and reach wildly for support. This impulsive movement sent the other slipper flying through the air! It described a graceful arc and landed on the sidewalk. The girl sat down heavily.

Fleming Knibbs congratulated himself on this heaven-sent opportunity to acquaint himself with her, as he stooped and retrieved the itinerant slipper. He turned, smiling pleasantly.

"Allow me," he said, and fitted it to her unshod foot.

"Thank you." Her voice was drowsy, as though it were early morning and she had just arisen.

He looked at her sharply. "You're not hurt?"

"Not at all," she replied in the same monotone, getting to her feet. She was an extremely pretty girl, Knibbs noted again, and wondered at finding her in this contrasting environment. He fell in step beside her, inquiring meanwhile if he might escort her to her destination.

"If you wish," she conceded.

She was obviously tired, physically or mentally or both. Fleming's interest was intrigued.

And now they found themselves in a more populated section. The street grew crooked. Situated in the tenderloin's heart, it turned and twisted convulsively, a veritable aorta of floating human derelicts writhing toward the river and a cheap amusement park on its banks. But the girl avoided the park, turning in an opposite direction. The crowd began to thin out. At the last corner, across from innumerable shadowy wharves, and reveling in an unaccountable river stench, stood a wobbly fruit stand illuminated by a single flaring gas jet. Dirty, flimsy wooden baskets containing all manner of fruits and vegetables tipped their rims partly toward the curb and partly toward the dark heavens, while here and there a shadowy head of cabbage peeped out upon this dreary vista. On a soap box by the stand, and directly under the uncertain light, sat a mere boy, thin of limb and vicious of feature, hunched intently over a Yiddish newspaper.

They passed this last outpost of the underworld, Fleming's curiosity growing apace. On the left stretched acres of slimy marshes, and beyond, only faintly discernible in the growing darkness, the river. It was too much for young Knibbs. He stopped in his tracks.

"What—?" he began, and then his mouth opened in surprise and astonishment, and he concluded "*—the devil!*"

For a blunt automatic had been thrust against his ribs, and the girl in the dark skirt and white slippers was talking to him in her soft, sleepy drawl: "Be still, or I shall have to shoot you."

Then deliberately she set about "frisking" him. Her slender fingers plucked his scarfpin, his watch and at

length found the inner pocket of his coat and his wallet.

She was talking again. "Now, then, stand as you are." She began backing away. "I am watching you. If you move an inch—"

The rest was left to be inferred. The click of her high heels on the sidewalk grew less and less distinct until it became inaudible.

Whirling, Fleming Knibbs dashed toward the corner. No one was in sight. The young Jew, as before, was hunched over his paper.

"A girl—" panted Knibbs. She came in this direction. Have you seen her?"

"I see no vun," replied the boy, sourly; then, observing for the first time the well-groomed man before him, his trade instincts arose to the surface and he became suddenly ingratiating, "*except,*" he emphasized, rubbing his skinny hands in anticipation, "my customers."

Fleming's wallet was gone, but he still had some change. One hand went readily to his pocket, emerging with a bright half-dollar.

"Here's the price of a dozen apples, my boy," he said. "Eat them yourself. Now which way did she go?"

The youth pocketed his reward, pointing meanwhile to one of the numerous small streets opening on the waterfront. Before he could speak Knibbs was off.

Doing a hundred yards in eleven flat, he came to a thoroughfare with car tracks. The girl was nowhere in sight. In the distance the vanishing lights of a trolley winked at him derisively.

"Gone!" he exclaimed in disgust. Then, brightening: "But wasn't she a peach?"

He caught the next car, intending to return home. When seated, he mentally inventoried his losses. There were several hundred dollars in the wallet. The pin was worth five hundred and

the watch another hundred. All told, she had netted close to a thousand dollars. "Not bad, for a half-asleep girl," he commented to himself:

The thought occurred to him that the whole matter should be reported at police headquarters, but in the instance he had strange scruples which he himself could not explain. He tried to console his conscience by emphasizing the fact that the loss meant nothing to him. Then he happily remembered his friend, Simeon Dreer, of the murder squad, who was occasionally willing, if caught in the mood, to aid his friends in working out their little problems. He promptly left the car and took another one cross-town.

Half an hour later he found himself in Dreer's apartment. The little, weazened man in huge green spectacles like twin railroad signals was talking on the telephone when Knibbs entered.

"Very well. I shall go there immediately," Fleming heard him say, and his disappointment was keen, for he knew the old fellow was being called out on a departmental case.

Simeon Dreer replaced the receiver on its hook and came toward Knibbs, peering intently with his near-sighted eyes.

"Ah, it's young Fleming Knibbs," he said at length in the tone of a discoverer. "Hello, Knibbs. Hello. Sorry I can't entertain you; I'm called out. Drop in tomorrow, eh? I've a couple of new records. A serenade from *Les Millions d'Arlequin*, and—"

Dreer was a musical enthusiast with a pronounced leaning toward the classical.

"I've been robbed," announced Fleming, "and I thought perhaps—"

"Robbed?"

"Held up."

"No! When?"

"Not an hour ago."

"This is interesting. I should like

to hear the details. As I said, I'm called out on a case: supposed suicide which may be a murder; but if you care to go along, we'll talk about it on the way over."

"Good. Let's go."

They were on the street in a jiffy. Knibbs hailed a taxi and leaped in while wrinkled old Simeon Dreer confided his destination to the chauffeur. Shortly they were bowling along at a good speed, with Dreer sitting quietly listening to his guest's story. When it had been concluded, the murder squad man chuckled. By the weak light of the street lamps Fleming saw his green glasses bobbing up and down.

"Very, very interesting, young Knibbs," he commented, when his mirth had subsided. "I shall look into it at the first opportunity. And on what street, by the way, did you meet this fair highwaywoman?"

The moneyed young man slapped his knee sharply. "By Jove, I'm an unobservant idiot. I can't tell you the name of that street. I was too busy soaking up its atmosphere."

"You would know it if you saw it?"

"From a million. There's nothing like it in the Western world."

"I believe I know the one you mean. In fact—"

At that moment the taxi stopped joltingly.

Dreer threw open the door and clambered out.

"In fact, young Knibbs," he called over his shoulder, "if you will look around, I think you will find that you are on it now."

II

KNIBBS emerged hurriedly. The old fellow was right. They were on the very street in which his adventures had originated. And more. They were facing the self-same rickety frame

dwelling from which the half-asleep girl had come not two hours before!

Simeon Dreer observed the fixity of his companion's gaze, and inferred the truth. "So this is her home, eh?" he said softly. "Well—now we have complications; for here, also, this evening, a suicide was committed."

Fleming gripped the other's arm convulsively.

"Not—not—the girl?" he whispered.

"Calm yourself," replied Dreer. "It was a man—an elderly man—"

Fleming sighed his relief, then laughed at the absurdity of his interest in her.

"I'm a romantic, susceptible, bred-in-the-bone fool," he told himself as he followed Dreer up the steps.

In the narrow, low-ceilinged entry—illuminated by a single gas jet, flaring weirdly—they found a policeman on guard: a Swede, one Hjalmar Yensen, with whom even Knibbs was acquainted.

"Good evening, Yensen," said the murder squad man. "What's been going on here?"

"Ay don' know. Somebody kill himself, Ay gass."

"You were sent from headquarters merely to see that no one left the house, eh?"

"Yeh. Ay ask skal Ay pinch somebody, an' dey say, 'Hal, no; leave dat to Master Dreer.'"

"Very good," nodded the weazened little fellow, his green spectacles bobbing eagerly, for he was always eager when approaching a case that promised difficulties. "Who's upstairs?"

"Yust a cop an' a doctor."

"And the residents—the people of the house?"

"Yeh. Ay forgot dem."

Dreer waited for no more, but clattered up the uncarpeted stairs with Fleming Metcalf Knibbs at his heels.

A light in the front room drew them.

They hurried past a bluecoat at the door and stood for a moment on the threshold, taking in the scene.

The body, covered by a sheet, lay near a small table in a corner of the room. In addition to the table were only two other articles of furniture: one a bedstead on which reposed the gaunt figure of a man of perhaps fifty, the other a chair; and seated on the chair, her eyes partially closed, was Fleming's half-asleep girl!

Knibbs drew in his breath sharply. The girl did not look up. She was apparently unaware of their entrance.

The physician approached.

"I am Doctor Collier," he said. "You are from headquarters, I take it?"

Simeon bobbed his green glasses again, peering up at the tall M. D. with his little, near-sighted eyes. "Dreer's my name," he remarked. "There's a suicide here, I understand, doctor. What do you know of it?"

"Merely this: that the officer on the beat heard a cry and ran in here to find this man—" he indicated the white-sheathed form on the floor—"with a knife in his heart. I was summoned, pronounced the fellow dead, and now your men are detaining me, in spite of the fact that I have a practice waiting."

"One more question. About the man on the bed: what's his affliction?"

"Paralysis."

"Can't move about?"

"Impossible. Only his neck and arms are free."

"May I have your card?"

"Certainly." The physician extracted one from his vest pocket, extending it under the old fellow's nose.

"Thank you. Haggerty, show the doctor out." Dreer swung on his heel, went to the bed and sat on its edge. "Tell me," he requested of the paralytic, "what happened here."

The invalid passed a hand over his deeply set, black eyes, as though to

clear his vision. Then he removed it and waved it weakly toward the corner.

"This man, John Ulrich," he began, "is my cousin. Like my daughter and myself, he has seen much misfortune. He came in tonight broken-spirited and stood at the foot of my bed and told me he was going to end it all. I tried to reason with him, but he wouldn't listen. On the table lay a knife—one John had brought with him from the East Indies when he stoked on a British steamer. He walked over and picked it up. Frightened, I cried out at the top of my lungs, but that merely frenzied him, and he drove the blade to its hilt in his breast. You know the rest."

"And your daughter?"

"She was here at the time. Weren't you, Lola?"

The girl nodded. It was no more than a tired little inclination of her pretty head. Knibbs could not help pitying her.

The questions continued. "What is your name?"

"Bastian De Brunner."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Less than a month."

"And previously?"

"Australia."

"M-mm," mumbled Dreer. Then he arose quickly, went to the corner and threw the sheet aside.

The body of John Ulrich was fully six feet tall and solidly constructed. His face, though somewhat distorted, revealed plain, rather commonplace features under a shaggy beard. His shirt was darkly stained where the knife had penetrated. The weapon itself, however, had been removed, and lay on the table.

It was, from all the evidence, a plain case of suicide, motive poverty. Yet doubt might be readily cast on the motive. For had not this girl, Lola, returned earlier in the evening with up-

ward of a thousand dollars in loot taken forcibly from Fleming Metcalf Knibbs? Was it likely, with this wealth in her possession, that she would allow a member of the family to kill himself because of dire need? No, it wasn't likely. Still—

Simeon Dreer went to Knibbs and whispered: "Talk to her while I engage her father. Ask her if she remembers you. Hint about the robbery and watch her face."

Fleming approached the girl, took her hand and drew her to one of the small windows overlooking the street. By the light of a corner arc lamp they could see, directly below, the half-rotted wooden steps on which she had slipped.

Knibbs pressed her hand gently. She looked at him. "Do you remember me?" he murmured.

"What?" Her tone was as listless as before.

"Do you remember having met me before?"

She gave a little negative shake of her sepia-crowned head. And then, trailing after, a long-drawn "No-o-o."

Knibbs waxed a bit impatient. This feminine Jesse James was either consummately clever or genuinely half-asleep. Her features hadn't yielded the slightest sign of recognition. He decided to be more explicit.

"You know," he said, "I was robbed this evening by—of all persons—a pretty young lady—robbed of a watch and scarf pin and three hundred dollars in currency."

"Were you?" she sighed.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry."

"Are you really?"

"Yes."

"Then, perhaps—" he lowered his voice still more—"perhaps you can tell me where they are."

She smiled very much as a child smiles in its sleep.

"How absurd," she said. "I am not a clairvoyant."

Fleming figuratively threw up his hands at the hopelessness of learning anything from her. She was maddening. Without further questioning he strode to the door. The detective, observing this, met him in the hall.

"Well, young Knibbs?" he queried, hopefully.

"She's the image of original innocence—or original sin—God knows which. Doesn't know a blasted thing about my hold-up; never met me; and all that. Oh, what's the use?"

"A phrase not in my vocabulary," replied Dreer. "Do you want me to arrest her?"

"Heavens, no! Send a girl—particularly as pretty a girl as she—to jail? I'd rather lose a few thousand more than do that."

"What *do* you want me to do?"

"Get my trinkets back."

Dreer became speculative.

"She may have carried this thing out on her own initiative, without the knowledge or consent of her parent, in which instance it's hardly likely she would bring the loot home with her," he muttered. "She's been to a 'fence,' no doubt. However, I'll have Yensen search the house and report to me tomorrow. There's nothing we can do now, except perhaps make undertaking arrangements. This other affair is plainly suicide."

They filed down the stairway, pausing at its foot for another chat with Hjalmar Yensen.

"My boy," said Simeon Dreer to the big, raw-boned Swede, "I know you are a careful, conscientious officer. I know you are thorough. And I have a little job here that requires thoroughness more than anything else. It's only a side-light on the suicide, but it may succeed in recovering some stolen personal property, and there's always a reward

attached to that sort of thing, you know. Now, Yensen, I want you to search this shack from cellar to garret for a diamond scarf pin shaped in a question mark, a Gruen watch, and an alligator wallet containing three hundred dollars in bills and a motor-car license made out to Fleming Metcalf Knibbs. Do your best to uncover these or anything else of interest. Incidentally, you might call in the matron from the Twenty-second District Station and have the girl searched, preferably without the knowledge of her father. When you are quite through, you and Haggerty may leave. Tell De Brunner we hold his household blameless; that the evidence of suicide is satisfactory to the department, and he will not be intruded upon again, though, of course, the final judgment is in the coroner's hands. Meanwhile, we shall summon an undertaker. Good-bye."

And they went out.

III

KNIBBS was awakened about nine o'clock the following morning by the ringing of the telephone bell. He arose, grumbling between yawns, and wended his barefooted way to the instrument.

"Hello!" he said briefly.

"That you, young Knibbs?" asked Dreer's voice at the other end.

Fleming's sleepiness vanished. Perhaps the old fellow had some interesting information about his half-asleep girl, of whom he had dreamed the whole night through.

"Yes, Mr. Dreer," he replied. "What is it? A new development in our case?"

"No; it's about the suicide, but I knew you'd be interested—thought you'd like to follow it up, you know, because—well, because the little girl is tied up in it, and—"

"Yes, yes—of course. What have you found?"

"A meagre clue. It may and may not be of importance." Dreer was always modest. "If you care to come over, we'll examine its possibilities together."

"But I thought the incident of the suicide was closed. I thought the department was satisfied."

"The department is never satisfied so long as a shadow of suspicion remains undisputed. To be brutally frank, young Knibbs, there is a *possibility* that Lola De Brunner murdered the man Ulrich!"

"No!"

"Yes—a possibility. I do not say it with assurance, and I hope, if only because of your interest in her, that it proves untrue. But it is there and cannot be avoided. As I said, if you care to come over—"

"Wait for me. I'll be over in a jiffy," cried Fleming.

He slammed the receiver on its hook, and a moment later was getting into his clothes with reckless haste. The girl Lola had taken a peculiar hold on him. Though the unusual circumstances of their meeting, not to mention the depressing incidents which followed, were certainly not—on their face, at least—of a nature to awaken the finer instincts, these instincts were awakened, nevertheless, in Fleming Knibbs, and, coming to analyze it that beautiful September morning, he concluded that it was so because there was something real about this girl that rose above the most damning facts, refuting them.

In brief, anything bad she had done wasn't true. He clung to this assertion because it was the only ground on which he could satisfactorily explain his attraction to her. He knew he wouldn't be drawn to a girl essentially bad; ergo folks had merely gotten the wrong angle on her acts and misunderstood them.

True, he had a difficult mental battle maintaining this stand. Inevitable logic

came forward again and again, arguing: "If a *man* approached you on the street, thrust a gun in your face, and relieved you of your valuables, he would be a thief, wouldn't he—a common highwayman? If a girl—*no matter how pretty*—does the same thing, is she not a thief also?" That was a stumper. Knibbs had to find a way to answer No so that he would believe it. And he did. But how he did is beyond the comprehension of any save those who, too, are under the spell of some lovely young woman.

Fleming Knibbs sacrificed breakfast that morning in his eagerness to see Dreer. Just forty-five minutes elapsed between the ringing of his 'phone and the instant he walked, unannounced, into the detective's strangely cluttered library.

Simeon Dreer was seated with his ear close to the phonograph, listening dreamily to the strains of *Les Millions d'Arlequin*. As his visitor entered, he raised his hand, without turning, in a request for silence.

Knibbs sat down and waited impatiently for the music to cease.

When it did, finally, Dreer, muttering "beautiful, beautiful," put the record away with great care and deliberation before joining his guest.

Then, fumbling in his pocket, he brought forth an envelope.

"This," he said, "was found by my good friend Yensen, and earned him a five-dollar bill."

"And this was *all* he found?" queried Knibbs. "No sign of the watch or scarf pin?"

"None. The girl asked him, you see, to help move her father to a back room, which he did. Afterward he discovered this missive under the pillow. Tactfully maintaining silence, he brought it to me. Of your trinkets, however, young Knibbs, there was not a sign."

Fleming looked at the envelope. It was addressed in a rangy scrawl to Bastian De Brunner and bore an Australian postmark dated six weeks earlier. Within was a sheet of linen letter paper. He drew it out and read:

Dear Bastian,

By the time this arrives you should be snugly fixed in your new quarters. I have no difficulty picturing you there; silent, of course; perhaps even brooding, but just as active in thought as ever.

How is Lola? Ask her, for me, if the trans-Pacific trip succeeded in lessening the intensity of her hatred for our mutual friend John Ulrich?

I am still with the old Smith & Townsend outfit, though I'll admit the routine is getting to be drudgery. Some day I may clear out for the States myself. In which event, you may be sure I'll look you up.

Trusting your health is improving, I remain

*Your friend and admirer,
Cassius Wynn.*

Knibbs glanced at Simeon Dreer, frowning. "So you think, because she entertained a dislike for the man Ulrich, that she killed him, and that her father is protecting her with his suicide story?"

"A natural assumption, isn't it?"

Fleming, being reluctant to admit it, remained silent.

"Young Knibbs," continued Simeon, "at what hour did this girl hold you up?"

"About nine, I should judge."

"And how long do you think it would take her to return home from that spot, provided she went directly by trolley?"

"No more than fifteen minutes."

"Then she could have been home at nine-fifteen?"

"Easily."

"You've considered, I suppose, that the stabbing occurred at nine-twenty?"

Fleming avoided the detective's gaze. He felt that by defending the girl he was putting himself in an awkward position, yet in his heart he knew he would go on defending her to the end. And the end? What would it be? Finally, seeking an argument on which to pin his dwindling hope, he asked: "How can you be so sure of your time?"

"Easily. There's a small grocery store on the corner, and in its window hangs a clock which Officer Haggerty is in the habit of consulting as he swings around his beat. It was exactly nine-twenty by that clock when, as he passed the window, he heard De Brunner's cry. Lola, it would appear, had been home five minutes."

Knibbs winced; then suddenly struck by an idea he leaped to his feet. "But if she returned directly home after leaving me, the stolen property must have been in her possession," he cried. "And as it wasn't in her possession, she couldn't have returned directly home, and must have arrived *after* the deed was done. That clears her of all suspicion."

He sat down in an exultant glow.

Dreer lay back in his chair and laughed heartily. His green glasses flashed in the morning sunlight pouring through the open window.

"The profession lost a genius when you took to clipping coupons for a life work," he chuckled. "My boy, consider these facts: all 'fences' do not live miles away from their co-workers. They may even live conveniently near. In which event the girl could have dropped in without losing more than a minute or two. Besides, it would be foolish for either of us to try to prove her absence at the time of the tragedy, for in addition to her father averring her presence, Haggerty found her in the

room when he entered. My chief reason for questioning you concerning the hour of the hold-up was to establish a limited area in which her 'fence' might be located. For I believe she employed a 'fence.' He may, really, be more guilty than she. And if we find him it may lead to a clearing of the whole mystery. I am beginning to sense a link between the robbery and the stabbing; and I'm glad, after all, that you didn't allow me to arrest her last night. Now she can be watched. You know, young Knibbs, the musty old saying: *murder will out.*"

Fleming was decidedly pale.

"I think you do her an injustice," he muttered.

"That's just what I'm trying not to do. If she isn't guilty of wrongdoing she deserves to be cleared in our sight. And if she is—"

He left the rest to be inferred, and on the whole it carried a sinister meaning with the shadow of the dreaded "chair" looming in the background.

IV

KNIBBS left his friend Dreer's apartment in a depressed frame of mind. He felt that if his half-asleep girl proved as black as circumstances had painted her he could no longer entertain faith in humankind. Also, in this indigo mood, he nursed a slight resentfulness toward Dreer for casting additional suspicion upon her, and reflecting deprecatingly upon his deductive ability.

He would show the old fellow. This affair wasn't over yet. The truth was still hidden from them. Thus steeped in his musings, and not fully realizing what he was doing, he signaled a passing taxi.

Within, he sat chewing the cud of his thoughts as the constricted city landscape flashed by. Twenty minutes passed. At length he felt the machine

stop, and heard the chauffeur's voice, "Here you are, sir."

He looked up. The taxi was standing before the little grocery store which Dreer had described. Then Fleming Knibbs remembered that, with some vague idea of accumulating additional facts, he had ordered to be driven into Lola's neighborhood.

He paid the man and stood idly watching him drive away. He didn't quite know what to do, where to begin. Uncertain as he was, he started to walk around the block, hoping a course would suggest itself. He passed the shabby De Brunner residence slowly. There was crêpe on the door, and the worn green shades in the front room were drawn to a level with the slightly opened windows. At the next corner he swung to the right. Shortly he came to an alley lined with drunken fences and battered slop cans. On the impulse he entered it. He knew he would find the De Brunner backyard somewhere along here. As to what he would do when he reached it he hadn't the faintest idea.

There were two stout women in faded gingham house dresses and aprons standing at a gate directly behind De Brunner's. As Knibbs neared them he caught snatches of their conversation. They were talking of the tragedy.

Fleming took his nerve in hand.

"Pardon, ladies," he interrupted. "I understand there was a suicide in the neighborhood—"

"You're right there was," responded the more garrulous of the pair, apparently glad for the opportunity to air what she knew. "In that house there—right in front of you. They just moved in the other day, an' now one of 'em's gone a-ready. Stabbed hisself. I heard the paralytic yell when he did it. An' then two men came runnin' out the back gate. 'Somethin's

wrong,' I told meself; an' sure enough I was right. They was goin' for the doctor, I guess, an'—"

"Well, well—too bad," commented the young man, restraining his excitement with difficulty as the last fact made itself known. "Did they return quickly?"

"I dunno. But they're back now. I saw 'em in the yard this mornin'."

"Too bad," repeated Knibbs, simulating the idle sympathy of the curiosity seeker. "However, such things are happening continually, aren't they?"

And nodding and tipping his hat he moved on, picking his way between cans until he again reached the end of the alley. But he looked cautiously back within a few minutes, and, finding the women gone, retraced his steps.

At the De Brunner gate he found, luckily, no bolts to hinder his progress, and entered quickly. All he wanted was a surreptitious look at the two men who had projected themselves into the drama, so that, should the occasion arise, he might identify them. He walked softly to the kitchen window and peered within. The room was empty.

Then, suddenly, he felt his ankles seized, and he fell, and was jerked through a narrow window into the dark, evil-smelling cellar. And before his senses had regained their equilibrium, his arms were trussed behind him with a strip of clothes-line.

He heard a coarse laugh. "Well, fella, that time yuh got fresh once too often, didn't yuh?"

At this moment the cellar door opened and a voice muttered:

"What's wrong down there, Belden? Why the racket?"

"Caught a snooper, Jim," retorted Fleming's assailant, triumphantly.

"No!"

"Uh-huh."

"Bring him up."

Knibbs's arm was seized in a rough grasp and he was thrust through the darkness. With the other man behind him, prodding, he marched up the stairs into the kitchen.

Now he could see the two men clearly. His captor was a short, stocky fellow with a bull neck, pugnacious jaw, and close-cropped red hair. A typical prize fighter. The other—a tall, lean chap—affected a little mustache above a pair of hard lips, and a stock around his neck.

The lean one faced him. "What's the big idea?" he demanded. "Come on, now—talk. What business have you here?"

This was another poser for Knibbs. He knew he had exceeded his rights by prowling around the place. Of course, he was doing it for the girl's sake, but he couldn't tell them that. What could he tell them?

"It seems I struck the wrong place—" he began.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! I guess it does seem that way now, doesn't it? Pretty weak; pretty weak. You'll have to do better than that."

"What will you do if I don't try—turn me over to the police?"

"Not a chance. That *would* be an easy way out for you, wouldn't it?" He winked, slyly. "No, fella, unless you can explain, I imagine old De Brunner will keep you here awhile. He likes company, and he has a way with him that may win a confession from you. Suppose you come with me and see him now."

With the lean man leading and "red head" bringing up in the rear, they trailed upstairs to a back bedroom. Bastian De Brunner, the paralytic, lay with several pillows propped under his head reading a newspaper. He looked up as they entered.

"We caught this fella," said the tall

one, as though *he* had had a hand in it, "prowling in the yard."

With his deeply set, dark eyes De Brunner studied Fleming Knibbs. "You were here last night, weren't you?" he asked.

Knibbs refused to answer, though he knew the sick man was not deceived.

"What do you want?" De Brunner continued.

Still Knibbs maintained his silence.

"Bring him here." The command came in a hard, inflexible tone from among the pillows. The lean spokesman and his companion leaped to obey. They half carried Knibbs to a chair beside the bed. Fleming found himself looking squarely into De Brunner's eyes.

"Go," said the paralytic to the two men lingering in the background. They went.

Knibbs felt the other's eyes boring into him, and he glared back defiantly. No words were spoken. It was a battle of minds. De Brunner's pupils seemed to glow like coals and his whole attitude was of striving for domination.

It came to Fleming at that dramatic moment, as he fought back, that Bastian De Brunner possessed hypnotic power, and a thrill of fear coursed through him. He suppressed it quickly, concentrating every force into his staring eyes. He must hold his own. He must not allow himself to fall under the spell.

Absolute silence prevailed in the room.

Slowly Knibbs became conscious of a numbness in the legs. It grew upon him an inch at a time, crawling like a snake past the knee and upward. He became desperate, frantic. He tried to shout for help, but no sound issued from his lips. He tried to tear himself from the chair and dash from the room, but his muscles were immovable, re-

fusing to obey the mental impulse. Vaguely Knibbs marveled at this. It always had been his impression that hypnotic control of an unwilling subject was impossible. Obviously De Brunner possessed an extraordinary power.

Then a sudden calmness swept over him as he realized that fear would only undermine his resistance, thus adding to the other's strength. Though this was his first experience with hypnosis—and he was accordingly handicapped by a natural awe of mysterious, unknown forces—he now coolly rallied all his faculties to defense, and once again clearly met De Brunner's gaze.

And then the door opened and Lola entered bearing a tray.

It was this interruption plus Fleming's rally that spelled defeat for the paralytic's initial stupendous attempt at controlling his captive's mind. Without a word he removed his gaze and sank deeper among the pillows. "Send Jim up," he said in a normal voice.

Lola set the tray on a bureau and, going to the door, called softly below.

Shortly the tall, thin-lipped fellow sauntered in.

"Make this man secure in the next room," ordered de Brunner. "I want to see him later. Needn't gag him unless he gets noisy."

The chap called Jim yanked Knibbs to his feet; and then they were in a small, bare room furnished only with a cot. Silently Jim pushed his helpless charge on the cot, stretched him out at full length and made him fast to the frame with stout ropes ably knotted.

"Guess that'll hold you awhile," he grinned as he departed.

V.

KNIBBS lay there the balance of the morning and far into the afternoon. Occasional footsteps passed the door,

going to or coming from the back room. Then there was a prolonged silence and Knibbs thought he detected snoring.

Fleming's position had now become not only irksome but decidedly uncomfortable. He was stiff from lying so long in one position and his legs and arms ached where the ropes had chafed them; for he had done considerable twisting and straining in spasmodic endeavors to free himself. Quiet having descended upon the mysterious household, he determined to make one last great attempt toward this end. Gathering all his reserve force in the effort, he drew his arms together and his knees up. The ropes held. He increased the tension gradually . . . and felt a thrill of exultation. His right arm was loose; his freedom remained but a matter of minutes.

Fleming Knibbs was casting off the last of his shackles when his anxious, roving eye observed the door opening silently. Transfixed with horror, he waited.

A figure slipped in and approached the cot. It was Lola. Knibbs breathed easier. He arose and held her arms. "Why are you here?" he whispered. "What do you want?" For a moment, in his highly excited state, he doubted her. The next moment he was ashamed of himself.

"I've come to help you," she replied softly. "De Brunner is asleep. Jim and Belden have gone to hire an auto. They intend removing you to a place where there will be less likelihood of the police finding you. By your attitude and appearance, De Brunner believes you a wealthy man-about-town who finds sport in traveling around with detectives. And he has designs on you—just what I do not know. He may hold you for ransom. Or it may be that he intends gaining mental control of you—as he has me. He's—he's the devil incarnate!" she concluded ve-

hemently. "You *must* escape him."

"But—isn't he—your father?"

"Thank God, no! I was once, at least, of a good Belgian family—the family of Langlois. But I lost everyone and everything I held dear early in the war. Distracted, I fled to Australia, where I obtained employment as secretary to the manager of the Smith & Townsend circus. It was before the full seriousness of the war had been realized and many men, particularly the older ones, had no thought of entering service. De Brunner was one of these. He was a versatile performer—a daredevil who provided half a dozen acts. But one day he took a chance too many, and dropped from a trapeze, injuring his spine. It was then he fell back upon and developed a latent hypnotic power, and I became his slave, doing his bidding, no matter what. Oh, I hate it! I hate it! If I, too, could only escape! But I cannot. He controls my body and my soul, and I am fearful of him."

Deeply interested and excited by this personal narrative from the girl whose sweet face he had learned to adore, Knibbs forgot his surroundings, forgot his desire to escape and the need of haste, and probed for more. "When you are under the spell, are you fully aware of what you are doing, Lola?" He used her name reverently.

"Yes; but faintly, as in a dream. Oh, I know I robbed you. I recall the details—hazily. But I could not tell you last night—with De Brunner there, and the officers."

"Being unable to do so himself, he intends using you to carry out his criminal designs, making you his unwilling automaton, and hiding from the law behind your skirts. Isn't that it?"

She shrank back as though struck; then, strangling a sob, braced herself. "Of course. It is plain. Yet no matter how much I fear the consequences

of my acts, I fear him more. Oh—I—I wish I were—*dead!*”

“Please don’t say that. Things will come out right. They *must*. Tell me, Lola, have you—committed many—ah—crimes at his bidding?”

She sighed with relief. “No; yours was the first. It seems the idea did not occur to him until he decided to come to America. I think perhaps Jim put it in his head. Jim and ‘Red’ Belden were canvasmen—rough as they come. And when De Brunner’s savings were exhausted—”

“I see. But who was the other man—this John Ulrich, who—who died last night?”

“He, too, was a student of hypnosis—a complacent hypocrite I have always detested. De Brunner became acquainted with him in Melbourne. Another circus man, Cassius Wynn, introduced them. It may be, too, that the idea of crime through hypnotic control originated in him, or in Wynn. I cannot say. But De Brunner was master of them all, despite his infirmity. And somehow he found in me his most pliant subject.”

“Tell me one more thing, Lola. Did John Ulrich commit suicide, *or was he murdered?*”

“I do not know,” she said, looking at him with frank eyes, and he knew she spoke the truth, but he was no less uneasy, for he believed he knew now what had transpired the night before. “I had just returned and in a sort of stupor was mounting the steps when someone screamed. I went in and lay the loot on the bed. Jim and Belden were standing staring down at Ulrich. De Brunner said something in a sharp tone; then Jim took the loot and both of them went out quickly. I saw no more of them until this morning.”

Knibbs welcomed the projection of other suspects on the scene. It relieved

him to think that, if Ulrich was knifed, either of the ex-circus men might have had a hand in it. But he had recurrent thrills of fear. For it may have been that Lola’s remembrance of that waking dream was incorrect—and that, after all, she had committed—No, no! Heaven forbid!

He took a short step toward her. “I think I hear someone at the front door,” he hissed. “Let’s get out of here. No; I’ll not go alone. You must come, too, Lola. I’ll care for you. I’ll—”

“No. It is impossible. . . . You were right. *There is someone below.* Hurry!”

“You—”

“Oh, if I only might! But I cannot. I feel those invisible ties and they’re—too strong—for me. Go now, please.”

The closing of the vestibule door reached them distinctly. There was need of haste. Knibbs cast one last pleading look at the girl, saw the uselessness of petitioning her further, and, determining to return later with the police department at his back, stooped and kissed her full upon the lips. Then he threw open the door and stepped into the hall.

He had delayed a bit too long. He stepped squarely in the path of the two canvasmen.

VI.

AND then Knibbs had his hands full. He met Jim—the lean fellow affecting the Chaplin mustache—with a crashing blow in the face that sent him reeling back against his companion. And he followed this up, launching himself like a tiger at the other’s throat. He made the silk stock his target, hoping, incidentally, that the force of his attack would carry them both to the floor. But unfortunately Belden had braced himself against the balustrade, which caused the whole tide of battle to turn.

Jim met his leap squarely, and shortly both were on him.

There was a crash, a great tangle of flashing arms and legs on the floor, the sound of blows, and at intervals above it all the awakened paralytic's voice calling to Lola.

Knibbs was putting up the fight of his life. And the fact that glorified his efforts was that he was not fighting for himself alone. It wasn't only that he defended himself against kidnapping or resisted being trussed again on that cot. It was something bigger and finer. Substantially, he was fighting for the woman he loved.

But it was a losing fight. Belden, being a bred-in-the-bone pug, and lean Jim having been thoroughly educated in toughness—an education incomplete without a working knowledge of the fistic art—Knibbs' chances were on the short end. Already his nose was bleeding and his chin gashed.

Then they piled upon him as in a football game, crushing out his breath; and he felt his surroundings slipping away, when the unexpected happened.

To Fleming Metcalf Knibbs, prone on the hall floor with the two ex-circus men belaboring him, the events which transpired now appeared more than ever dream-like. The rickety front door was thrust inward and an avalanche of rushing footsteps came to his ears. The pressure on his throat and chest was suddenly relieved, and as he moved his head weakly he saw Simeon Dreer, of the murder squad, looking down at him through his ridiculously large green spectacles, while all around swarmed blue-coated and brass-buttoned forms.

"Hoo-ray!" cheered Knibbs weakly, staring back at Dreer with a silly smile. He felt that he ought to get up and welcome his rescuers, but for the life of him he couldn't move a muscle.

At an order from Dreer, an officer

got him under the arms; and then he found himself standing on shaking, uncertain legs, one hand on the balustrade post, the other moving across his forehead. Slowly his faculties revived.

Out of the little room came Officer Yensen, holding Lola tightly by the arm.

Knibbs saw red.

"Release that lady," he bellowed, or tried to bellow, for he was still too weak to achieve the real thing. Yensen looked uncertainly first at Knibbs then at Simeon Dreer.

Simeon smiled tolerantly. "Do as the gentleman requests, Yensen," he said.

It was done; whereat those remaining in the hall proceeded to the rear room where the discomfited ruffians and their leader were under guard.

"A charming gathering," commented Dreer. "At what hour is tea served?"

"Sir, your sarcasm is anything but appropriate," said the paralytic from among his pillows, pretending righteous indignation, though his face was livid with wrath. "By what right do you force your way into my home—at this very moment a house of death?"

Dreer maintained his nonchalance. "If it were not a house of death I should not be here," he replied, "though it appears fortunate for Mr. Knibbs that I happened along when I did. However, his rescue was incidental and secondary. I have come after the murderer of John Ulrich!"

"*The murderer of Ulrich!* What do you mean?"

"My English is clear, I believe. I'm sure you understand me, De Brunner. If not, I shall be more harshly explicit. There's an ambulance waiting outside to take you away. There's a police patrol, too; and I might add, if I may be so indelicate, that were you not bedridden, you'd ride in the latter."

"You charge me—"

"Sure. With the murder of John Ulrich."

"Ridiculous." De Brunner's eyes narrowed to pin points.

"Not altogether," continued Simeon, calmly. "You won't deny, I take it, that you were once a circus performer—a versatile person, as clever on the trapeze as at knife throwing!"

He paused impressively.

The paralytic's face blanched.

"I see you're on," he snarled. "How you did it I don't know and don't care. You're a clever devil yourself. But neither you nor the commonwealth shall have the satisfaction of administering—my—punishment—"

It was over in a trice. They saw his hand move quickly, convulsively, under the sheet. A spasm of pain crossed his face. His head jerked up. The muscles of his neck and shoulders tensed. For a moment great physical strain was apparent there. Then he relaxed and his head rolled to one side.

Dreer leaped forward and threw back the covers. Evidence of Bastian De Brunner's act was sickeningly apparent. A dagger—the very one Ulrich was reputed to have brought from India—was plunged to the hilt in his side. Quickly removing it, he drew the sheet up over the still form.

"The state is satisfied," he said.

* * *

"But how—?" began Fleming Metcalf/Knibbs for the hundredth time.

They were in Dreer's cluttered apartment. Lola Langlois was seated in one of the spacious chairs, with Fleming draped over its arm, gazing longingly down upon her. He had looked up just long enough to put his question to Dreer.

The little man tinkered with his green spectacles a moment before replying.

"I hardly know whether to tell you or not," he said. "The truth is I shall probably sacrifice my professional rep-

utation in your eyes by doing so. For the whole thing was so absurdly simple. You see, young Knibbs, after you left this morning I made a second careful examination of De Brunner's letter from Cassius Wynn and found the envelope not torn open but carefully cut. That implied one thing, didn't it—that De Brunner opened his mail with a knife? Of course, to do that, he has had at times a knife in bed with him. Suggestive, eh? But not complete. Doctor Collier's statement now returned to me: that although paralyzed De Brunner's arms were free. Further illumination came when I learned upon inquiry that Smith & Townsend was not the name of a mercantile house but of a traveling circus. Some showmen in town supplied me with final details. They remembered Bastian De Brunner and his knife-throwing act. What more would the densest sleuth require? Immediately a picture of John Ulrich disputing De Brunner's power suggested itself. Perhaps Ulrich threatened to expose him to the police. At any rate a lost temper and a hurtling knife terminated the incident in tragedy. It was Ulrich's death cry, not a call for help from De Brunner, that brought the police. And there you have it. You, young Knibbs, supplied equally as important information as I, however, in learning of this strange fellow's criminal intentions."

Dreer arose abruptly and went to the phonograph and shortly the strains of *Les Millions D'Arlequin* filled the room. Sitting raptly by the instrument he drank in every note.

After a moment he appeared to have been struck by a thought. Unexpectedly, he cut the record off in its prime, and, stealing a side glance at the youth and maid, now busily engaged in whispered conversation, he left the room.

Exactly twenty minutes later his apartment bell rang. Of which, also,

Fleming Knibbs and Lola were blissfully unaware.

Then Dreer's green spectacles poked their way through the door. Fleming had his half-asleep girl in his arms—no longer half asleep, however, for her lips were pressed to his in passionate surrender. The little man said later he never saw, and never expected to see again, so beautiful, so colorful a picture.

He coughed.

"Come in," said Knibbs, without looking up.

"It's Hjalmar Yensen below," explained Simeon. "He says 'Red' Belden and the man called Jim confessed to making off with your personal prop-

erty and named the 'fence' they had employed. He has recovered everything, young Knibbs, and wants to see you."

"Can't," replied Fleming, briefly, giving the chair a hitch so that its back was now to the door. "I'm busy. Tell him to leave the Ingersoll and scarf pin in your care. As for the wallet—let him keep it."

"And its contents?"

"Of course."

"Whew!"

"And Dreer—"

"Yes?"

"Invite him to the wedding. We can have him watch the gifts, you know."



The Tell-Tale Band of Yellow

By Hamilton Craigie

CHICKEN-FOOT Darragh, with a skinful of cheap Italian red wine, lurched, stiff-armed, against the basement grille. The warped treads of the ancient staircase creaked under the pressure of a careful footfall—then, at what he saw, outlined in the red circle of the single gas-jet, Darragh's loose lips sagged open—stark, elemental fear strangled the outcry in his throat—his blunt finger-nails met like talons, hooked into the basement gate.

A moment he stood thus, while above him, like a face without a body, there floated against a black pool of darkness, the dreadful head, like, in its semblance, to nothing animal or human save in the broad, porcine snout.

For a moment it held against the red glimmer of the gas which, in a debased aureole, seemed to pale to a flat, toneless shading of unholy fire. Then it passed, like the brief smoke of a wind-blown torch.

Darragh knew nothing of *hippogriffs*, of *leprechauns*; he might have called it a gargoyle, a djinn, had he known them by their names. Nor was he familiar with Anubis, the dog-faced deity of the Egyptians—but the head which he had beheld was kin to none of these. . . .

Now, spread-eagled against the grating, he fell suddenly sick, the fumes of the cheap liquor he had drunk mounting in a swift, dizzying surge against his brain. Stumbling, reeling, clawing desperately outward, behind him the memory of the Thing which he had seen, he gained the street, and, after a headlong flight of several blocks, a park bench.

But his last conscious impression, ere he sank into the stupor which would last until well into the next day's noon, was of a face which seemed to float, head-high, at the height of a tall man, like a face without a body—a face unspeakable, inhuman, and yet—real—in its terrifying semblance, half-dog, half-pig—whole horror. And with it, too, ere he sank like a stone into the sea-green silence of oblivion, there persisted in his nostrils a savor, a stench, an acrid, faint tang, as though the very air itself had been tainted by the passage of that nameless terror.

II

DETECTIVE SERGEANT SINSABAUGH, off duty at two A. M., went up the steps of the Varick Street tenement wherein he kept bachelor quarters. No. 32 was a malodorous building in a neighborhood grim and chancy enough of its kind. On one side there loomed the squat bulk of a stable; on the other the towering outline of a chemical plant.

Sinsabaugh, however, was thinking that it was his last night as a bachelor, and, consequently, his last night in No. 32. For tomorrow he would be married . . . his last night. . . .

But tonight, despite the joyance of his mood, there was something in the air—he felt it as a heaviness, a deadness, a breathless, weighty hush like the tension before storm. But the August evening was close and sultry.

And yet, as he mounted the worn steps, into his mind's eye, unbidden, there came a face: writhen, snarling,

bestial, vengeful—the face of Duster Joe Masterman, gang leader and all-round crook, as he had last seen it on the day that Masterman had gone “up the river” to begin his ten-year term for loft burglary.

It had been Sinsabaugh’s testimony which had convicted the gangster, and Masterman had sworn to “get” him. “You damn double-crossing dick,” Masterman had promised, “I’ll get you—and it’ll take me just ten years and a *day*—and then—”

But others had threatened Sinsabaugh—there was nothing novel in it—it was just a part of the day’s work—the vicious hatred of an underworld for all that typified the Law—an hereditary and accustomed hatred accepted and understood.

Today, however, Duster Joe was out; no doubt he was even now showing himself in the haunts he had aforesaid favored; Gaspipe Looie’s, doubtless, for one. It may have been habit that caused the policeman to feel for his service pistol as he paused in the entrance of the hallway. But as he reached behind him his groping fingers suddenly became rigid—a faint, hissing breath sounded from his lips as he felt his arm caught and held abruptly from behind.

Sinsabaugh pivoted as a boxer ducks under his adversary’s lead, whirling sidewise to face—the empty street. Then he grinned foolishly, clucked with his tongue, and released his coat-sleeve where it had caught in the ornamental ironwork of the banister.

But he hesitated on the threshold, glancing upward where, above the black well of the stairway, there hung a faint pinpoint of gas.

Sinsabaugh was not imaginative, but—it was his last night as a bachelor—almost it seemed as if that touch upon his coat-sleeve had been a warning, a message, a summons laid upon him by

the urgency of invisible fingers . . . nonsense!

But the murky air continued heavy, lifeless—the unwinking eye of the gas-light somehow sinister, malevolent. As has been said, Sinsabaugh was not imaginative, but now, like a swimmer breasting a tide of impenetrable and soundless flood, he mounted with slow steps the narrow stair. And about him as he went forward the darkness closed in like a wall, sinister, threatening, above and beyond him that pinpoint of gas, like an evil star now curiously bluish, flat, unreal as a flickering, painted flame.

Sinsabaugh loosened his pistol in its arm-holster, searching the thick-piled shadows massed beyond the fell circle of that brooding beacon. He drew his Colt. If Masterman awaited him somewhere upon that stair or upon the landing above, he would be ready for him. Hugging the wall, for the more silent footing there afforded, the policeman, one hand before him, feeling along the plaster, the other holding his gun, went upward steadily in the whispering gloom, eyes strained against the blackness, ears attuned to the throbbing silence, like the beating of a heart.

The gas offered no illumination beyond its flat nimbus of pale flame, but it seemed to Sinsabaugh that if he could see nothing, there yet lingered in that atmosphere an aura, a something felt yet unperceived. Something or someone had been before him on that stairway, if he or It had passed like the passing of a candle’s breath in the malodorous dark.

At the stairhead he crouched, swung up his arm, and the bright lance of his pocket flash clove the darkness in a dazzling arc to right and left. But there was nothing.

He halted at the door of his chambers—shrugged—inserted the key in the

lock. The heavy, sound-proof door swung wide—then, following his entrance, slammed shut behind him with a muffled clang.

There came a blow at the base of his brain like the impact of a mighty hand—he staggered, stumbled, fell prone into a struggling, choking hell which took him by the throat, a rising tide engulfing him with an acrid and intolerable stench. His gun barked, once, at the convulsive pressure of his finger. But it was a dead man who fired the shot.

III

OFFICER WILLIAMSON, passing on his beat through Varick Street, halted a moment before No. 32, a puzzled look on his broad, good-humored countenance. For a brief instant, head in air, he sniffed upward, like a pointer—then, his face gray, he reeled abruptly against an area gate, his hand at his throat, coughing like a man in a fit.

His side-partner, turning the corner, as it chanced, at the sight of Williamson doubled over the area-gate, came on at a run, unslinging his pistol.

"What's up, Jack?" he called; then he, too, halted in mid-career, falling to a stiff-legged walk, as an acrid stench smote him in the face in a blinding, overpowering flood. With his last remaining glimmer of sense his fist crashed into the glass of a fire-box—then he slumped into oblivion. After a moment cries echoed down the street, followed by the clang and rattle of the patrol. Men came up at a run, halted, turned back—then, out of the confusion there arose the cry of "Gas!"

But it was not until the arrival of the Rescue Squad that some order was obtained out of the chaos, when, following the arrival of the police and fire companies, the sufferers were treated with a vaporized solution of milk of

magnesia,* and Williamson and his partner removed to the nearest hospital.

But as for Detective Sergeant Sinsabaugh—he was beyond their ministrations.

* * *

Gunson, Sinsabaugh's partner and friend, was stubborn in his belief that it was not altogether an accident which had been responsible for the death of Sinsabaugh.

"It was an accident, all right—but it was *planned*, I tell you, Chief," he was insisting to Inspector Murchison, his immediate superior.

"If you're thinking of Masterman, Dave, you're all wrong, boy," replied Old Dan. "He's not in on this—how could he be? Anyway, you know what it was—th' gas-tank exploded in Thompson's warehouse next door, and—"

"Well—that's all right, Chief, but how do you account for the fact—"

"—That it got into Sinsabaugh's rooms first? Why—that it smashed through the party wall—it is only a few inches thick there, you know—and Sinsabaugh's rooms were right up against it."

"Sure, Inspector—but this is what I believe—" Gunson leaned forward earnestly, tapping his knee with a blunt forefinger. "I believe that someone—Masterman, for a good guess—made that hole in the wall, pushed the tank through, and then smashed it open in Sinsabaugh's rooms, just a little while before poor Jim came home—to die." He paused. "Masterman knew all about tanks and gas—he was an expert—before he turned yegg—an oxy-acetylene blowpipe would have done it—easy—for him."

The inspector grunted.

"That's all very well, Dave," he made

*Chlorine antidote.

answer, "but there's one little thing you've overlooked—there's one flaw in your argument: we'll suppose Masterman, or whoever it was got into the warehouse—breached the wall—rolled in the tank—and let out the gas with a blowpipe. Well and good. *Then, how do you account for the fact that the murderer—if there was a murderer—was not himself gassed?* You know what chlorine is, Dave—no—it was just an accident—that's all there is to it."

Gunson's jaw set stubbornly. "I can't answer that, Inspector," he said—"I'm not going to try—just now—but as sure as—as Duster Joe Masterman came out of stir when his time was up—Jim Sinsabaugh was murdered—and you can't make me believe anything else."

He rose, his face grim with purpose. "You'll give me a week—working alone?" he questioned. "That's all I'll ask—a week—no more."

By way of answer the grizzled inspector bowed his head. Sinsabaugh had been one of his best men. He liked Gunson.

"Go to it, my boy," he said heavily, "and—good luck."

* * * *

Gunson took his leave. But there was one thing he had neglected to mention to Inspector Murchison; a small thing, if you will—but a clue which had furnished him with an idea—a something he had observed at the house on Varick Street on the day of the explosion as the firemen had issued from that house of death. This he had kept to himself, but time was precious. A day might be too little—or too much.

IV

CHICKEN-FOOT DARRAGH reclined against the bar at Gaspige Looie's. At

Looie's you can still purchase a pretty fair quality of hooch for four bits even now, and the snowbird brigade makes it a headquarters, too.

Darragh, his head wagging foolishly, his loose lips mouthing his words, retailed a story for the twentieth time, half to himself, half to a saturnine individual with a predatory nose and a straight gash for a mouth who had for some reason, bought Darragh a drink.

"Here's luck," said Darragh. "Well—as I was sayin' . . . I seen this ghost, or whatever it was, as I was goin' in th' basement door. It looked like—it looked like—"

He paused—shivered—drained his glass.

"Yes?" prompted his new friend. "Like what, bo?"

He spoke in a friendly tone, yet like velvet over steel, but if Darragh could have seen his face—the look in the deep-set, implacable eyes—his whistling breath might have ended in a sudden gasp.

But he did not.

"Why—why—like a dog—a pig, Mister," he replied. "I seen it—sure—but—I dunno."

His head wagged, his eyes glassy with his potations. He fumbled again with his loose lips, muttering inarticulately. The stranger cleared his throat—then he spoke in a carrying voice!

"You had 'em sure, bo," he asserted. "Th' jinnies—you'll be seeing pink monkeys and green elephants next if you don't keep your feet down—I'll say so."

He glanced about the room. "Guess you're right, mister," mumbled the derelict, without offence. "I had 'em had, sure enough." And then, with an abrupt, drunken stubbornness: "'Twuz Dago red wine—I ain't never seen things with Dago red wine, Mister—it was there . . . I seen it—it moved—"

right under th' gas—it moved . . . sure . . . well—g'night—g'night."

He turned, swayed, lurched out into the night, a grotesque, shambling figure, misshapen, formless as the long, wavering shadow which fled ahead, cast by the sputtering arc at the corner. And behind him, behind, he did not see that other Shadow, quick, stealthy, furtive, for all of its bulk—a shadow with predatory eyes and a traplike mouth, moving like a great, grim cat in the darkness. . . .

The shadow was nearer now, and a little wind, pattering in the dust like the feet of an invisible army of the dead, stole forward on the wings of the night, whispering, ending with a quick shriek and a sudden hush. A storm was brewing in the west . . .

Like figures in a dream, pursuer and pursued entered a broad belt of darkness like a deep well of night. The clump-clump of the derelict's heavy brogans echoed for a moment across the cobbles at the intersection of an alley, beyond it the revealing radiance of a street lamp.

He saw it—and that was all. For, while the brooding blackness held there came the snick of steel—a choked gurgle—a muffled cry, like the quick squeak of a mouse in the wainscot—a thud . . . silence.

Chicken-Foot Darragh had passed on—into the dark.

V

GUNSON, earlier in the evening, had paused a moment in his search for Masterman before the window of a store which had caused him to suck in his breath in the sheer surprise of a discovery which he was certain dovetailed with the other clue which he had turned up at No. 32. He had heard the story of Darragh at second-hand, and now, as he stared through the dingy pane of

the old curiosity shop a sudden inspiration took him by the throat.

Why—why—of course—that was it—it had to be—for Gunson was confident that he had seen Darragh's "ghost," or, at any rate, his counterfeit presentment, leering at him through the dirt-encrusted pane. But a hurried questioning of the proprietor, a Spanish Jew with a fondness for gesticulation in inverse ratio to his almost unintelligible speech, gave him pause—but only for a moment. Gunson, however, made a rather peculiar purchase, which he bestowed carefully in an inner pocket.

Masterman, after all, need not have entered that shop; in the second place he was far too shrewd a malefactor for that. But the suggestion remained, fantastic, incredible as he owned it to himself to be, and Gunson, at the corner of the street had had it corroborated, so to speak, when a wizened nondescript rose up almost at his elbow.

"Darragh—Chicken-Foot—he's at Gaspipe's—he said t' tell youse he'd wait."

And Gunson, without more ado had sought the derelict and the saloon of Gaspipe Looie, perhaps five minutes after the departure of the vagrant, and—his shadow.

Looie knew nothing—of course. That was to be expected. Gunson could spare no time to tighten the thumbscrews of his inquisition. It was going on for eleven. He hurried.

"That—runhound—Darragh been here lately, Looie?" he had asked.

For a moment as he faced the swart Syracusan behind his stained and battered bar Gunson was conscious of a movement at his back: a ripple, an eddy, a swift, sudden current of electric tension. In the stained and spotted mirror he could see but little, but at Looie's reply of "Naw—thee's a bum—he go—eight-nine o'clock," and a look which he fancied that he saw in the

sullen, furtive eyes of the saloonkeeper, Gunson whirled on his heel in a lightning pivot.

They came at him in a headlong rush, silent, no guns—knives out, life-preservers—an evil ring of dark faces and clutching hands. Something hissed in a thin-drawn whine at the level of his cheek—the knife clanged, quivering, in the mahogany. Voices rose, bestial, snarling: "Croak him . . . croak th' bull!" A slungshot at the end of a swart, hairy arm, drove over his shoulder.

Gunson had been trained up from the streets, the alleys. To a habit of lightning decision was added the perfect co-ordination of muscles steel-hard and willow-withered. Now he multiplied himself—the fighting flame of his Norse forebears rising to a Baresark fury at the thought that these were the paid hirelings, doubtless, of the man who, he was now convinced, had murdered Sinsabaugh. His fist, behind it the weight of two hundred pounds of iron-hard muscle, crashed into a grinning face. The face was blotted out.

Illemmed in as he was, there was no time for gunplay—it was fist and elbow against knife and club in a ferocious free-for-all of which the issue could not be long in doubt.

He went to one knee under the glancing impact of a sandbag, heaved upward, shook his head as a pugilist rallies his whirling wits—and then, muscle and mind and body, hurled himself in one furious, headlong dive into and through that vicious ring of steel. The spank of a clean-cut blow was followed by a groaning curse, and for the first time the crash of an automatic, and the dull *tsung* of splintered glass.

A red-hot needle seared through his cheek as, ducking under the outstretched arm of the last of his attackers, his swinging uppercut was followed by a grunt and a slumping fall. Then

he was through the swinging doors—and away.

They would not follow him—of that he was reasonably certain—but nevertheless he went forward at a lunging run, jerking his service pistol from its holster as he approached the black maw of the alley.

Then—he stumbled—went to his hands and knees—fumbled a moment in the darkness, produced his pocket flash. And in the radius of that clear beam he saw, staring up at him from the cobbles, the dead face, with its staring eyes and brief, twisted grin, of Chicken-Foot Darragh.

* * * *

MASTERMAN, secure in the knowledge that his decoy had by this time accomplished his purpose (he had had Gunson trailed for the best part of the evening) went swiftly to a room which he kept in a slightly more respectable neighborhood.

This he had used often enough in the past—Gunson was aware of it, of course. Now, with that healthy fatigue which is the prerogative of thieves and murderers as well as of honest men, Masterman flung himself on the bed. He was dog-tired, so much so that he had removed his coat and hat, merely, before he was breathing easily, like a man whose conscience had never been burdened with anything heavier than a hearty dinner.

As a matter of fact, he had bent over to unlace his shoes, but in the very act sleep had overtaken him. If he had done so, this story might never have been written—but he did not. And he had had them on since the night of Sinsabaugh's death, just twenty-four hours previous.

It had required no very special keenness on the part of Gunson to deduce, that Masterman would do the very thing that he had done—seek his room.

The detective knew the address, and, anyway, the obvious had its importance—he would try here first, at any rate.

Slipping in quietly by the side door (the room was over a saloon on a quiet street) Gunson, unseen, mounted the narrow stair—listened a moment at a door on the second landing—turned the knob noiselessly—unlocked the door by turning the key from the outside with a long, thin wire made for this purpose—and entered.

And so—Masterman awoke at a dazzle of light which struck him full in the eyes. He blinked owlshly—then sat upright with a jerk, his hand reaching for his gun and then falling at his side at the crisp voice of the detective:

"I've got you covered, Masterman."

The yegg cursed, stared a moment wildly; then his pig eyes snapped evilly as Gunson's other hand, reaching upward behind him, turned up the light. Gunson, putting away his flashlight, bent a hard eye on his prisoner.

"I want you, Masterman," he said evenly, "you rotten killer—step lively, now—you hear?"

But Masterman, his composure returning after that first, amazed glance which had assured him that Gunson was unarmed, spoke, sneeringly confident:

"You've got nothing on me, Gunson," he said, his heavy face, with its blue-shaven jowls, assuming a satiric mask. "You can't prove nothing."

"I have—or rather *you* have," replied Gunson cryptically, "and I can prove everything," he was beginning. "Shake a leg now—" when abruptly there came a startling reversal.

Not for nothing had Masterman abode aforetime in that haven of the dwellers by night—Paris, of the thousand eyes. And among other accomplishments of that grim underworld of the Apache, most ruthless of his kind, had he acquired a more than average

efficiency in the art of *La Savate*. Now, at Gunson's crisp command, he came suddenly into action.

His right foot, shod with its pointed boot, swung upward in a bone-smashing kick, almost too deadly swift for the eye to follow, aimed at the detective's face. The impact of that bruising kick would mean unconsciousness, a broken jaw—or worse.

But if Masterman was consummate in the attack, in the lightning upthrust of that deadly lunge, like the swift swing of a javelin, Gunson was not unprepared. There is but one parry for that abrupt *passade*: a single, deft movement, an estoppel as swift and certain as the delivery of the kick itself.

Gunson moved his head a scant half inch to the right, as a boxer evades the whiplash of a straight left, his hand at the same instant curving in a short arc. His fingers closed like iron about the yegg's ankle—there came a quick heave, an abrupt explosion of movement, and Masterman crashed downward to the floor.

He glared defiance and implacable hate, merged, however, with a certain respect. But still he rasped out, between panting breaths:

"You've got nothing—on me—Gunson—you think—you're wise, don't you?"

"You've—got it—on yourself," repeated Gunson. Then he leaned over the fallen man, his words, slow, bitter, dripping with the still acid of a corrosive vengeance:

"You're slick, Masterman—but—you overlooked one thing . . . one little thing . . . you're in, bo—up to your neck—heels over head, I'll say." He barked a short, grim laugh. "I had the motive—all I needed was a clue—and I got it—at No. 32, while I was watching the firemen coming out. You croaked Darragh because he'd seen—this—"

With his free hand he jerked from his pocket the purchase he had made at Spanish Joe's, thrusting it before Masterman—a sinister exhibit indeed—the “ghost” of Darragh's perfervid dreams—a gas mask of the French type, long-snouted like a boar, terrifying, indeed, as an accessory to silent halls, dim night, and alcoholic imaginations.

“But that isn't all, Masterman,” continued the detective. “It's not a circumstance to this—thing you've fastened on—yourself.”

He stooped, his voice rising to a note of triumph:

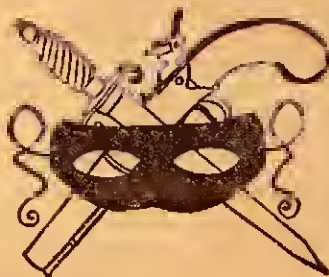
“You're in, Masterman—ankle-deep!” he cried, bending swiftly, and

jerking the half-laced shoe from the foot of the murderer.

“Yellow!” he exulted, “and that's your brand, you shillaber.”

For, as acid acts on litmus, so chlorine impregnates with its revealing color change the substances which it touches.

Across and across, where the blue sock of the murderer came above the protection of the shoe, there shone the stigma of an ineffaceable guilt: the in-eradicable, inescapable, indelible proof, even as Gunson had seen it on the stockings of the firemen—the revealed and all-revealing stain: *a broad band of staring yellow!*



The Murder at Lost Creek

By Robert E. Hewes

I

STRANGE things take place in the north country, *m'sieu*, but I have known none more strange, or terrible, than what happened that night in the lonely cabin on Lost Creek,—the night the wind wolves danced. Ah, *m'sieu*, even now I can see the way that man lay there, the knife blade gleaming—what of it was not buried in his heart, and feel the cold fear that crept down my back. Ugh! But I should not dare tell this story to even you, *m'sieu*, was I not very sure you could never find the place.

It was a bitter night, *m'sieu*, that I was caught in a storm up in the Height-of-Land country. Even the oldest woodsman is fooled sometimes, and the storm came up even quicker than I had expected, catching me many miles from my cabin.

I thought I knew my trap line well, but after dark, when the snow devils build strange shapes out of the drifts, then tear them down again like children knock over play houses to make something else, familiar landmarks look queer and unnatural.

I had no compass and the stars were smothered by the clouds that shook loose the snow that floated down, swirling, steady, suffocating, filling up trails and leavening valleys until the northland was one great white plain with no end and no beginning.

Ah, *m'sieu*, for long hours I floundered helplessly in that night of terrible whiteness, utterly bewildered. The soft snow underfoot, clinging in the manner of

new fallen flakes, seemed to be tugging at my boots, striving to pull me down. And the hard sleet pellets that flew through the air in a straight line stung my eyes till I was almost blinded and cut my face till the blood came. Then the frost crept in and seamed my skin with great, aching cracks.

It is a terrible thing to be lost in the north country in a storm such as raced in a mad dance that night. The cold was a cruel, searching thing, that crept into one's bones and sucked at the marrow.

I stumbled along blindly, hour after hour, and always that terrible cold clawed at my vitals and always I could hear the wind devils howling like hungry wolves, eager for their prey. My throat burned from thirst, and each time I thrust a handful of snow in my mouth it was dry like chalk dust and I blew it out still unmoistened.

I knew I was far off my trap line, wandering somewhere far into the lonely north, but I was even farther than I thought. Many times I fell, and each time it was longer before I got up. As I lay in the snow a strange warmth would creep over me and I grew drowsy—why not sleep, I thought; after all, what did it matter? And I knew that soon I should fall and not rise again. Then, with the sleep imps tugging at my eyelids until I felt I could no longer resist them, I saw a light.

I tried to cry out for joy, but my throat was so parched I could utter no sound.

I could see that the light was in a little creek, some trapper's cabin, I

thought, and stumbled toward it madly, rubbing my eyes with my fists to keep them open. Twice the light vanished, and each time tears came to my eyes, while I sobbed like a child. Then, each time, a lull in the whirling world of whiteness showed it again. I thought I should never reach it, and was sobbing from despair when suddenly I saw a shadow loom before me and I fell against a door.

The next moment there was a sudden blaze of light that blinded me and a blast of warm air against my face.

I was conscious of falling forward on a hard floor, and of a woman's frightened cry. Then all was black.

II

WHEN I regained consciousness my first feeling was of pain, white-hot, searing pain that darted across my face like little streaks of fire. I moved and my whole body responded with a great swell of torture. I could not help but cry out from it, and I heard a quick stir at the other side of the room where I lay in a bunk.

I turned my eyes and saw a cabin typical of the trapper's shacks scattered throughout the north country, with a rifle over the fireplace where pine sticks blazed, and great bunches of furs hanging on the walls; rich, glossy pelts of marten and fox. Then the girl bent over me.

M'sieu, she was beautiful. She was young, not more than twenty, I thought, and her skin was white like new milk shaded as by rich cream from wind and sun. Her lips I should have sworn were painted had not the cut of her belted dress and the way her black hair was piled loose on her head told me here was a girl who knew little of civilization. She was a wild thing of the woods, sweet and beautiful like the flowers. The hand she laid on my head was soft and cool, and, *m'sieu*, I swear it, under that touch

the pain left as snow melts before the breath of the Chinook in the spring.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"You are safe," she half whispered the words, and threw a nervous glance over her shoulder toward the door.

Then she smiled, but still I saw fear in her eyes.

She brought me hot broth then, and scalding tea, that loosened a little the grip of the frost devils in my body and set the blood flowing more freely. But still I could not get up, for my legs were swollen and aching with the rheumatism in them. The cold of the north does not easily let go its grip.

That day I lay and watched the girl move about the cabin working, cooking over the small stove in one corner, sewing, or turning drying pelts that hung on the walls. But always she seemed listening, and at each sound at the door she started nervously.

Often she would press her face to the window glass, striving to pierce the terrible murky whiteness outside. For the storm still tore on in its mad dance, and made the day almost dark as night so that the lamp had to be kept burning. And as I lay there watching the girl, who every now and then threw a half-fearful glance at me, or staring at the smoked rafters of the roof, I had a feeling that here in this cabin I had stumbled on some mystery of the north—which hides so much that is terrible and tragic.

The wind screeched mournfully over the chimney and I got to fancying that at times it laughed, yes, *m'sieu*, actually laughed, like some fiend that watches and waits for the enacting of tragedy to satisfy its bloodthirsty humor. And I wondered what it was out in that white storm that the girl feared.

The day wore on, and again the great darkness stole over the north country and blotted out the dim light that filtered through the falling snow. And with the night the girl's nervousness and fears

seemed to increase. The frost in my body was so loosened now that I could turn and watch her better. Several times I tried to draw her into conversation, then, after awhile, she came and sat by my bed.

"*M'sieu*," she said, watching me with her great dark eyes, "how—how did you come here?"

There was that same fear in her voice, and something else I did not know, whether hope or merely wonder.

Then I told her how I had got caught in the storm and became lost, stumbling upon the cabin by accident.

"Ah," she sighed, when I had finished. "You are the first, *m'sieu*, to find it. Yes," she went on at my look of wonder, "there is but one person in the world besides myself who knows this cabin is here. Even I do not know the way out of this hidden country—Lost Creek, I call it."

The door rattled then and her face went suddenly white as the floating flakes outside and she threw a quick look of fear over her shoulder.

She turned to me again with a little shiver of relief.

"It was only the wind," she faltered, smiling feebly.

I raised myself on my elbow then, and seized her hand that lay on my bunk, like the hand of a child that seeks company in the dark.

"Listen, *mam'selle*!" I cried, "tell me what is it you fear?"

"Oh, no, no, please, *m'sieu*, I cannot!"

She drew away with fear alive in her eyes.

But I was persistent, and, woman-like, in her heart she *did* want to confide in someone, and then—she told me.

She was an orphan, left when she was very small in the care of an uncle, who had always been what people call queer. She told how she had known him to sit for a whole day at a time, silent and

moody, taking no note of what went on about him. In the winters he trapped, but he made no friends and, in fact, so much as was possible, avoided contact with other people.

She loved him, for he was her only relative, and cared for him tenderly. And though there were other people who were inclined to be frightened of him, he was like a child in her hands. A great affection for her grew in his heart as the years went on, and he came to be restless and uneasy whenever she was out of his sight, as though he was afraid he should lose her.

They lived, the two of them, far up in the Height-of-Land country a many days' journey from any post. But I have said she was beautiful. *M'sieu*, do you know there is about a beautiful woman something that draws men, even from great distances, like gold? Ah, *m'sieu*, nature can not long hide her two greatest treasures.

So it was that a lover came. He was a trapper, who stopped at the cabin one spring as he was on his way south with his winter's catch of furs, and there he saw the girl—her name? Ah, *m'sieu*, that I never knew. After all, names matter so little in this world. Those two loved each other from the first, and therefore that summer the young trapper came often to the cabin.

The uncle saw all this, and there awoke in his mind that latent fear that the only thing that had ever awakened a bit of affection in his heart was to be taken away from him. He threatened the trapper, but the young men of the north are brave. The lover laughed at him. Then the devil that had been brooding in the uncle these years awoke and stirred to life. The man became a maniac, with but one idea in his distorted mind, that to keep the girl from being taken away from him.

In his young days the uncle had once trapped in a country far to the north,

where few men ever go, and in that sad and lonely country there was known to him a hidden creek where one might live for long years and never see so much as a wandering Indian. And it was that one night the girl was awakened from her sleep to find the mad uncle commanding her to rise and come with him.

He had a canoe packed with their belongings, ready in the river near their cabin. She looked but once into his eyes and saw there the devil light that told her it was useless to resist. She knew he loved her, in his savage, selfish way, and would not harm a hair of her head so long as she obeyed him. But if she did not, she knew he was mad.

When morning came they were far up the river, and there were none behind who knew whence they had gone. The girl had tried to leave some message in hope that her lover would find it and follow, but the madman suspected she would try such a ruse, and watched, making it useless.

For three days they paddled up the river, and the fourth day the uncle transferred all the duffle to the bank and sunk the canoe.

Then for three more days they traveled far up into the north, twisting and turning in strange regions where the girl lost all sense of direction and knew she should never find her way out.

The fourth day they came to the little cabin on the hidden creek where the uncle had trapped one winter and where no man had been since. He repaired the house and there they lived, the girl desperately hoping that some day her lover, who she knew was scouring the northland searching for her, would find the place.

"Ah, *m'sieu*," she said to me, and her dark eyes glowed with the light of faith. "some day he will come, I *know*!"

The madman, too, knew the lover would search until he found his sweetheart, or died, and always he watched

the rims of the surrounding hills, his hand caressing his gun and the devil light gleaming in his eyes. And gradually there grew up in his heart a hatred of all mankind because one man had dared to covet the only thing he loved. And now, in his perverted mind, he came to fancy all men were leagued together, aiding the lover in his designs. And in his sleep he would mutter terrible threats that boded of evil to whatever man should set foot in the valley.

So that, *m'sieu*, was what the girl feared. For the uncle was out running his trap line when the storm broke and now she feared he might return at any time. And if he should come back, and find me?

I tell you as I lay there in that cabin I cursed the frost demons that held me helpless. Sometimes, as I listened to the terrible whine of the storm and felt the cabin shake in its grasp, I thought that perhaps he should not return, that the howling wind wolves would have their prey. But then, in my heart I knew it could not be so, for evil in a man makes him hard to kill.

"If he finds you here, *m'sieu*," sobbed the girl, "he will kill you!"

I tried to quiet her fears, but there were too many in my own heart for my words to be convincing.

That night I came to know fear. With the girl I started at each sound at the door, and terrible imaginings crept into my mind. The girl sat by the fire and sobbed softly, while I lay awake, watching, listening. And always I could hear those wind devils, laughing, actually laughing. They were waiting.

Then, after a long while, I fell into a fitful sleep and had bad dreams.

It was with a start that I awoke suddenly, conscious of a man's voice. Ah, that voice was born of the wind devils that howled outside in mad glee. Deep and rolling, it was savage like a maddened bull moose's. But rising above it,

high-pitched and stabbing like a dagger, I heard a woman's frightened scream. I opened my eyes and for an instant I saw the girl, back to me, struggling fiercely beside my bed, and heard her crying desperately.

"No, no, uncle, you shall not harm him, you shall not—!"

"Found us, eh," I heard the rumbling bellow of the bull-like voice, "think he's going to steal you for that damned young upstart, eh? A-h-h, we'll see!"

Then he laughed, laughed like the bloodthirsty wind devils outside.

Suddenly the girl was flung aside and I saw a towering hulk of a man looming over me, huge, foreboding, like a great pine tree towers over one in the dusk.

His face was close to mine, and, after these many years, I can see that face even now . . . and shudder as I did then! It was a round, evil face, with a black beard that fell almost to the great chest, and with long, shaggy eyebrows. But it was the eyes that were so terrible, gleaming with the light of the devil. They were the eyes of a madman.

He laughed again, then, and I felt his rank, tobacco-laden breath on my face.

"So!" he cried, "you came at last, eh? But you shall not go, see!" And as he raised his hand I caught the gleam of the knife.

Then I forgot I was weak with rheumatism, forgot the frost demons that held me down, and with a mighty effort tried to rise. The devils that still lurked in my bones growled, and sank their claws afresh in my vitals. I gave a cry, and fainted even as I saw the reflection of the firelight running up and down the knife blade in glittering streaks. But before I went I heard a strange thing, heard it dimly as in a dream.

It was the girl's voice, high-strung and poignant, and there was no fear in it, but a gripping something that came from the heart. She was crying out a name, madly, hysterically.

"Jean, Jean!"

That, *m'sieu*, was all I heard.

III

WHEN I again came to, I was lying on the bunk, as before, and for a moment I thought I must have been dreaming.

Then I saw the pine fire blazing, and noticed the hearth was piled high with sticks, in the manner of a fire stocked to last a long while, and at the side of my bed a small table held food enough for several meals. I also felt that my face had been freshly treated with grease and bandaged.

I moved cautiously and found that the frost devils had loosened their hold on me and I could use my muscles freely. Soon, I knew, I should be well as ever.

Then, I missed something. It was the howling of the wind wolves outside, and I knew the storm had finished its mad dance and blown its life away.

Then, with a start, I thought of the girl, and the madman, and the glittering knife. I called, but no one answered. Yet I felt there was some presence besides myself in that room.

I raised myself on my elbow and, ah, I shall never forget what I saw, or the cold fear that ran down my back like an icy finger as I looked.

He lay there on the floor in the center of the cabin, the madman, and his lips were parted, showing his teeth in a hideous snarl. And his eyes, ah, *m'sieu*, the devil had left them, now they were cold and colorless, like the ice on the frozen rivers. But what fascinated me was the knife that gleamed—what of it was not buried in his heart, and the blood that was thickened in a little pool at his side.

I got one leg out of the bunk, then the other, and staggered to my feet. For a long while I stared at the horrible thing lying there on the floor, with the hideous

snarl frozen on the lips, then again I thought of the girl. I stumbled to the door and threw it open. For a moment I saw only the great snow field that stretched off to the horizon, dazzling white in the sunlight. Then I saw something else.

M'sieu, what I am going to tell you may sound strange, but I swear by the saints it is true.

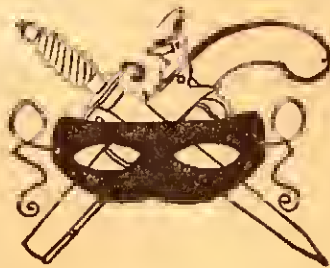
You may say that providence does not bring about such coincidences as to lead a heart-broken lover, wandering over the northland, to a hidden cabin on a stormy night just in time to—ah, say what you will, *m'sieu*, I swear it is true, that there, streaking off across the white plain, like twin threads, I saw two trails, a man's and a woman's, that spun away toward the south, where they merged with the horizon haze in the distance.

There is little else to tell. My strength came back quickly, as it does to us who live outdoors, and so soon as I was

strong enough I dug a grave back of the cabin, and there I buried the madman, with the hideous snarl frozen on his lips.

The second day I packed provisions and followed the two trails that spun away toward the south. And so treacherous was the country that I had gone but a few miles until, looking back, I was sure I should not be able to again find the hidden creek, were the trails obliterated. Lost Creek, the girl called it, and it was well named. Nevertheless, I carried with me the knife I had drawn from the madman's heart, and which I had seen was not his own. Three days later I threw it through an airhole into the racing *Asthasbasca*, where the two trails I had followed ended on the clear ice of the wind-swept river. Then, with my sense of direction restored, I turned toward my own country.

That, *m'sieu*, is all I know of the matter.



The Guerilla

By Clinton Harcourt

I

HIS name was Joe Cragen. His family were poor but respectable. Old man Cragen was a law-abiding citizen and Mother Cragen a benevolent, white-haired woman whose fondest recollections were of the County Mayo.

Environment played a large rôle in the drama of Joe Cragen. His family lived on Tenth Avenue and before he was in long trousers he was running with a gang of pickpockets. Before he was nineteen Cragen was Shorty McCabe's first lieutenant. When a cop cut short the career of the McCabe with a half inch of lead, leadership of the dreaded Power House gang was Cragen's by right of inheritance. It was then that he became a Guerilla.

Under his aggressive guidance the Power House band flourished and grew opulent. The strip of territory they commanded adjoined the waterfront of the Hudson River and existed in a state of terror. Timid citizens shunned it with a shudder; the policeman that patrolled it walked in the center of the streets, directing cautious glances at the housetops. When gang fights were in progress the quarter huddled in cellars, but battles were few. The Power House gang was seldom attacked.

So long as Joe Cragen kept to his own district all went well. For a year he sat on the throne of the Power House band and ruled with a mailed fist. But there fell an evil day when in a bandit taxi he ventured into lower Manhattan. He had made plans to stick-up the paying teller of an east side bank. The plot

worked easily, but the nerve of the bank employee had not been considered. In the pistol duel that resulted, Cragen fainted the teller out into the open, braved the man's fusillade, shot him four times from the doorway, leaped back into the pirate taxi and vanished.

The same night Cragen crept through the meshes of far-flung police nets and "rode the cushions" to Chicago, leaving the Power House gang to be broken up by the police.

II

ON an August night four years after the bank stick-up, and the flight of Cragen, a lean, gray-haired individual in a rusty blue serge suit, cracked shoes and greasy cap entered Wolger's West Street hotel, crossed the uncarpeted lobby floor and moved to the desk that Abraham Wolger presided over, where he spoke briefly.

"How much for a flop?"

Wolger pulled the glasses up on his curved nose, rubbed a hairy ear and after plumbing his inquisitor with a long stare frowned thoughtfully.

"A quarter for the night," he replied slowly.

The stranger produced two dimes and a nickel, wrote the name Andrew Hardy in a grimy register and was led off to one of the small, cot-adorned coops the hotel was honeycombed with, Wolger staring after him.

In the room he had rented for the night, the man who called himself Andrew Hardy closed the door and sat down on the bed. For a time he stared at the floor with narrowed eyes. Finally

he took an envelope from a pocket of his shabby jacket, unfolded it and with painstaking care spilled out a quantity of something that resembled talcum powder.

He dropped it on the crease in his hand made by thumb and forefinger and sniffed it up his nose in the manner of one taking snuff.

Replacing the envelope in his pocket the man flexed his arms and sighed contentedly. He reached in a hip pocket and lifted out a small blackjack with a thong about the neck of it for the wrist. He examined it with obvious satisfaction, wet his finger and rubbed away some dark stains and small pieces of hair from its blunt, leather-covered nose. He dropped it back into his hip pocket and stared at the floor again.

Several minutes later he closed the door of the cubicle and went down into the lobby, making his way to Wolger's desk.

"Where can I get a snifter of kick?" he inquired shortly.

As he spoke he made a peculiar sign with the thumb and little finger that was significant to the proprietor of the hotel, versed in the mute language of crookdom.

"Downstairs," Wolger directed, frankly searching the man's face with a puzzled expression, "First door to the left at the end of the hall."

The one he addressed nodded and slouched away. He traversed a short hall, opened a door and descended into a basement where illicit drinks were being served to furtive faced clients by a lantern jawed waiter who wore a filthy apron.

The man seated himself at an empty table and rummaged through his pockets until he found a few pieces of silver. He laid them down on the table and waited until he attracted the attention of the waiter.

"Rye, Bill. Back me up a wash of it and never mind the water."

A half pint of fiery moonshine was set before him. The man consumed a third of it, pulled his greasy cap well over his eyes, folded his arms and slouched back in his chair.

For ten minutes or more he sat stirless. After a while he became aware of the sound of chair legs being drawn along the cement floor; garments brushed him and presently the words of a whispered conversation drifted back to his ears.

"There's nothing to it," the voice of a man said. "Tip Regan looked it over and said it's as safe as a church. The old woman locks the store up and crawls into the feathers at ten bells."

A second voice containing a note of warning sounded.

"Soft pedal—there's a gin hound back of you."

Andrew Hardy, as he called himself, felt he was being intently scrutinized.

"Stewed to the scalp," the first speaker said after a pause. "As I was saying, Tip's got a freight as job in the Pennsy yards and is pulling silk. He passed the word to me. It looks good."

"What's the dope?" the other asked in guarded accents. "Where's the store at? What time do we take a shot at it?"

There came the clink of glasses and a cough.

"It's called the Empire Fish Market," the first speaker resumed. "It's up on Eleventh Avenue, corner of Forty-ninth Street. The old moll that runs it is a widow woman. She knows a pollicie and a couple of big restaurants have been taking all of her fish. Tip says she's got about two grands salted away in a drawer under the counter in the store. The old girl is foxy and has an electric bell on the drawer. She thinks that will keep it safe."



The man walked past the building, turned, and after a quick glance about, entered the tenement's hallway—Page 94

Glasses clinked again for a minute or two.

"Sounds mighty good," the second speaker muttered. "I'm with you. When do we start up?"

The man who called himself Andrew Hardy strained his ears.

"Not before one o'clock," the first voice answered. "Here's the way we go in—"

His words were drowned out by a gusty rumble of conversation from across the room; almost at once a party of men entered the basement and took chairs noisily at the table to the left of the listener.

The self-styled Andrew Hardy waited no longer. He climbed to his feet and in imitation of one very drunk lurched to the door. He threw it open with a maudlin backward glance that mentally photographed the faces of the two conspirators, closed it and hurried up and out into West Street where a young moon sailed low, in a day-long heat haze.

A pulse of excitement began to beat within him. The hour was not quite midnight and more than sixty minutes still remained before the two men of the basement would put their plans into effect.

He fumbled in his pockets until he found a five-cent piece, turned east to the first avenue beyond and arrived in time to leap to the running board of a north bound surface car.

III

At the corner of Forty-ninth street the man alighted and turned toward the river.

The street he passed through was squalid with drab tenements marching cheek to cheek in dingy array. The gutters were filled with refuse awaiting the prowling garbage remover; the iron fire escape landings were heaped with

disordered bedding upon which heat-wilted children tossed.

The street was tawdry and pallid with no single redeeming feature. Yet the man who passed along it darted eager glances to the right and left. His attitude was almost that of one returning to a beloved spot after a long absence.

On the corner of Eleventh Avenue he slowed his pace, halted altogether, and took stock of his surroundings. The junction of street and avenue was deserted save for a nocturnal stationer closing his shop; no brass buttons glinted in the lamplight—the section was wrapped in the heavy stillness of an August midnight.

With footsteps that displayed no incertitude, the man approached a fish store directly opposite from where he stood. It was one of three shops in a red brick tenement; a narrow, lightless entrance and hallway separated the fish market from the other two shops. The man walked past the building, brows drawn together, turned and after a quick glance about entered the tenement's hallway.

Some knowledge of the construction of stores seemed to be at his command. To the left of the building's narrow, wooden stairway was a single door—a door that opened into the back room or rooms of the fish market. The man tested its china knob, found it did not respond to his touch and lighted a match, cupping it in the palm of his hands. He held the light aloft, perceived the glass transom over the door, smiled faintly and plunged his light out.

In the murk he fumbled for his folded envelope. He dropped some more of its powder on his hand and inhaled it.

He listened for a minute before mounting a few steps of the stairway.

When he was opposite the transom he leaned over the rail of the stairway and pushed it in with the palms of both

hands. To his infinite relief it swung in, squeaking rustily.

He listened again and made his way down the steps.

He wound a dirty handkerchief about the china knob of the door, removed his shoes, placed his left foot on the knob and caught the ledge of the transom.

With sinuous agility he drew himself up and over the sill, wriggling through the small space made by the open transom and dropping with scarce a sound to the floor on the inner side of the door.

It was too dark to ascertain what his surroundings were, so he stood motionless, straining his ears. Suddenly, so close that he recoiled, he heard a sibilant sigh and the creak of bed springs. He drew his brows together again and fingered his lips. It was impossible that he had erred; in all probability this room was a chamber adjoining the fish store—the bedroom of the old woman the two conspirators had spoken of. He decided there must be a door near at hand that opened into the store itself and determined to locate it forthwith.

With the deep, even breathing of the sleeper in his ears, the man followed his sense of direction and groped a careful way forward. With each step his blood warmed within him. Two grands in crook parlance meant two thousand dollars. It was a sum worth striving for. With that amount of money in his possession he could fulfill long cherished ambitions. He could buy enough dope to lead him into a Castle of Dreams; put the city he had entered so recently from him and journey to the coast. The key to all wishes was before him—in a hidden drawer under the counter in a fish store.

The outstretched hand of the man slid over another door. They touched a knob and turned it. The second door did not yield and was keyless. He stood still for a minute, thinking. The woman who owned the shop was canny. She evident-

ly understood the difficulty of breaking in from the outside, and by locking the connecting door and secreting the key made doubly difficult the felon's progress.

The man turned his head in the direction of the bed. He must possess the key that opened the door or the expedition would be fruitless. He drew the leather covered billy from his pocket and slipped the thong about his wrist. He debated briefly whether it was advisable to wake the sleeper and demand the key or to use the blackjack immediately and search for it at his leisure. His ruminations were abruptly terminated by a sharp inquiry that cut the gloom like a knife:

"Who is there?"

The man stiffened, his fingers winding about the neck of the blackjack. The bed creaked again and two soft footfalls sounded one after the other. He strove to pierce the curtain of blackness with his eyes, but failed. In some way the sleeper had become aware of his presence; he heard hurried, rattling breathing that was an indication of fear.

His fingers about the blackjack grew still tighter.

The dull patter of feet moving preceded the rasp of a key being turned warily in the door that opened into the hall of the tenement. Even though frightened, the woman was not losing her head. She intended preparing an exit if escape became necessary and a vantage point from which she could both survey the bedchamber and raise a quick alarm if her suspicions proved to be correct.

A dozen rapid steps carried the man across the darkened expanse of room. He brought himself up short as he collided with an unseen figure, clutching a withered throat with his left hand and effectually preventing a scream from surging to lips opened to receive it. At the same moment he thrust the weight

of his body forward in such fashion as to put himself next to the door and forced the woman away from it.

Where's the key to the other door?"

He released the pressure of his hand on the throat sufficiently to permit a weak voice trembling with terror to croak a panted answer:

"Under—the—mattress—"

Savage elation brought the teeth of the man together with a grinding click. He began to force the woman across the room, laughing at the puny, feeble blows she struck wildly at him. He dug his fingers deeper into the thin throat, an old lust to kill swimming in his blood. He strove to see how far he might choke her before insensibility came, laughing louder at the faint moans and series of agonized gasps that came just before the mad, futile blows ceased and she staggered in his clutch.

Then wearying of the sport and mindful that time was flying, he used his blackjack twice, flung his victim across the bed and delved under the mattress . . .

IV

THE following morning, Abraham Wolger, at the desk in his West Street hotel, looked up from the third morn-

ing edition of his favorite paper and addressed a burly youth who was sweeping out the uncarpeted lobby with a worn broom.

"Look it, Jake," he said, stabbing the newspaper with his stubby finger. "Last night was a murder in a fish store up on Eleventh Avenue. Two thousand dollars was stole and the old woman what owned it got murdered. Ain't it funny? It says right here she was Mrs. Cragen, the mother of that Guerilla what croaked that guy in a bank four years ago this month—the same guy I was telling you looked just like a man who registered here last night and never showed up again."

The youth with the broom fingered a twisted ear.

"Was there any pinches made?" he asked succinctly

The proprietor of the hotel looked back at his paper.

"Yes—the cops grabbed the two guys as they were coming out—a coupla friends of Tip Regan they were. They didn't find the two grands on them, the paper says, but what difference does it make? The chair for both of them sure! Honest, Jake, guys like that who would croak a widow woman ought to get burned in the chair . . ."



Two Bells

By Harry C. Hervey, Jr.

AT two bells The Boy determined to commit murder.

It was no swift decision. On the night the *Libertine* lifted anchor at Melbourne—and Black Michael flogged him with a rawhide lash—the desire to slay had been impregnated in him, a terrible sore whose putrifying poison daily seeped into his blood and brain.

Quite suddenly, standing there in the shadow of the long-boat, he perceived the death of his soul. Black Michael was responsible. He had inoculated him with a dreadful serum of evil that wiped out the germs of his strength; had proceeded, while he was in this weakened condition, to loot his being of all finer instincts. For that Black Michael must die.

The avenger. That was his rôle. Tonight he would become the champion of his slain self and write in crimson the final chapter of a bitter story.

As he stood there on the deck, swaying with the drunken pitch of the two-masted, square-rigged vessel, it all came back to him—came back for the millionth time, with a burning sharpness that made him visualize, as though etched with steel upon his brain, the lamp-lit Australian water-front, the slinking shadows along the quay; made him feel, as if experiencing again, the sickening emotions following the blow and the return to consciousness in the hold of the trading brig bound for eleven degrees south of the equator.

"I'll break you yet, boy—I'll grind you under my feet—"

B. M.—Nov.—7

That was Black Michael's threat when he sought to resist the big-fisted, rum-loving skipper. Then followed the first flogging, stripped and lashed to the beam. . . .

The recollection of it was gall in his mouth.

After that life for him consisted chiefly of two things: the lash and rum—the whip to break his body, the liquor to break his brain. These were linked by labors so offensive, so repellent that he welcomed the hours of drunken sleep when for a brief while his senses were drowned in oblivion.

In all this darkness there were two candles: the friendly attitude of the first mate and the queer companionship of the brig's mascot, Kerachi, a Rajputana parrakeet.

Before the vessel reached the white coral walls of Papeite, Black Michael demonstrated that he could keep a threat; The Boy was broken; the slender thread between strength and weakness snapped . . . like the string of a fine instrument struck by brutal hands; and when the *Libertine* cast moorings in the blue lagoon of the Tahitian capital he was still aboard, with a bruised body and a bruised mind, knowing in his tortured heart that some day, when the courage was given him, he would kill the master of the brig.

From Tahiti the ship passed through the coral traps of Les Isles Dangereux, sailed around the low archipelago into the phosphorescent waters of the Marquesas . . . to Hiva-oa; and there, in Atuona Valley, he received the gift of courage—from The White Lotus.

Three days ago—the one time he had gone ashore—he had seen her clinging to the door-frame of a thatched bamboo dwelling. “Old Babache’s kid . . . a leper,” he heard someone say.

And she had smiled at him.

An hour after that, when the long-boat was putting away from the beach, and the tawny maidens of Hiva-oa ran out waist-deep in the green bay to wave farewell, she was there, her gold hair falling like glinting fire about her pale, spfay-dashed face.

“Ia ora na i te Atua. . . .”

With the Marquesan girls she sang that farewell—this White Lotus that he had found dying in the mulch of the South Seas. . . .

The sight of her was to him a light that pierced his poisoned, vapor-clung brain. And because he had seen her, this pallid leper-child, he knew that the hour had arrived when the master of the *Libertine* must pay the penalty for having murdered his soul.

Yet what would she think if she knew? But she would never know. Hiva-oa, dreaming its eternal dreams beneath the brooding thunders of Temetiu, had already slipped into the past—and in its dreams she lay, a part of them.

He shuddered again. Yes, he would kill Black Michael. He was below in his bunk now—drunk, as usual. With the skipper gone, the first mate, Cardigan, would come into command—and then . . .

He crept across the wet deck and down the companionway.

A door in the rear of the lazarette, which was just off the main cabin, admitted him to a passage amidships, beneath the deck, leading forward to a space in the fo’castle where he and five others of the crew bunked.

In the bulkhead door he paused. A sooty slush-lamp, swung from the blackened beam, cast sluggish light

upon six bunks arranged in double tiers along the bulkhead. It was a foul place, reeking of vile sea odors.

Two of the bunks were occupied. The lower tier of one supported the hulking body of a bullet-headed mulatto, clad only in short breeches, while above him lay the boatswain, a Creole from New Orleans. They were both asleep and breathing heavily.

Thrusting the weapon under his belt, he retraced his steps along the passage amidships and in the gloom of the main cabin groped toward Black Michael’s quarters.

A terrible fear laid frigid fingers upon his heart as he reached the door. For a full minute he stood transfixed to the spot, his breath caught in his throat; then he grasped the knob, turned it and the door swung open.

Within, the closed porthole—a pale eye of dread—stared at him. The air was close—tainted with rum . . . and human flesh. He listened for the sound of breathing, but only the monotonous murmur of the bilge water and the creak of straining timbers could be heard.

He drew the knife from beneath his belt—

The leper child came to him then . . . a blinding flash of spiritual pallor, the shining recoil of his dead self that sprang through the darkness of his soul and smote him paralyzed for the moment.

But Black Michael must die.

He reached the bunk; looked down upon the indistinct, sprawling figure. A wave of hysteria swept him, swamping his courage. He wanted to run, to throw himself upon his mattress and weep out the sorrows that twisted his heart. But—

. . . A swing of the blade, a sickening sound . . . and it was finished. He never released his grip on the hilt;

held it as though it were a member of his own body; withdrew it and fell against the door.

For some time he lay with his shoulders pressed to the panels, at bay, facing the specter of himself; but when at length the fear-paralysis released him, he burst out of the door, closed it, raced through the main cabin and up the companionway.

The air on deck seemed to lift from his brain the mantle of a loathsome vapor. Here in the tropic moisture of the night, where the wind swelled amongst the waving spars, his reason returned, swept over him like a cold and shuddersome flood.

He glanced fore and aft. The decks were deserted but for a lone figure on the poop deck. The watch—he could recognize him—a form planted as a piece of statuary upon the wheel-grating.

He slunk past the forward hatch and climbed the ladder to the fore-poop. A stinging spray, flung over the bowsprit by a long gust of wind, struck his face sharply. It seemed to awaken him to the fact that he still gripped the knife, and with a shudder of repulsion he let it fall to the deck planks. For an instant he stood above it, looking as one fascinated upon the glinting thing; then he touched it with his bare foot . . . shivered . . . and pushed it across the deck until it disappeared over the bow. . . .

A sobbing breath was drawn from his throat. He turned and fled down-deck—as one pursued by the horrors of the nethermost hell.

Upon reaching his quarters he found the mulatto and the Creole still asleep; the slush-lamp hung from the blackened beam, swaying with the heave of the brig.

A chill started him to trembling and he knelt beside his bunk, removing a flask from beneath the mattress. As he

lifted it to his lips a sound behind him made him pause with it in mid-air.

"Get below, you dirty lubbers! . . . *Bahdsoodai!* . . ."

He turned his head sharply. Neither the mulatto nor the Creole had altered his position—but perched upon the beam was a feathery green body. His rigid muscles relaxed as he recognized Kerachi, his friend, the Rajputana parakeet.

He raised the flask to his mouth. The vile Tahitian rum was like vitriol, searing a path from his throat to the pit of his stomach. It choked him, but when he ceased coughing he took another gulp—another. . . .

"Step lively, lads! . . . *Adrush-tam!* . . . Two bells, mate!"

Two bells. Those words startled him. That was just before he—

He shuddered; swallowed quantities of the liquid fire; drained the bottle and fell with his face buried in the reek of the mattress. The flask slipped from his nerveless hand—struck the floor with a distant thud.

"O, God—" he moaned. Hot tears burned his cheeks as he lay there sobbing in the awful abandonment of drunken grief.

"All hands aft!" shrieked the parakeet, then began to swear in Hindustani and Mandarin. That was the last thing he heard, the grotesque profanity of the little bird. Like a barque severed from its mooring-lines, his brain was carried downstream on the current of slumber. . . .

His labored breathing had hardly joined that of the other occupants of the foul place when the big mulatto sat up cautiously, a stealthy, anticipatory smile spreading over his negroid features.

He rose, the movement bringing into visible play the thick, heavy-corded muscles beneath the bared brown skin; stood an instant looking up at the

sleeping boatswain; crept across to The Boy's bunk and slipped one hand under the mattress . . .

II.

THE sharp cutwater of the *Libertine* broke the phosphorus into javelins of green brilliancy, her yards, slightly checked, ran with easy motions beneath bellied topsail, while the deck-timbers creaked and groaned as the vessel wallowed in the heavy sea.

To Cardigan, the first mate, standing alone at the wheel, firmly gripping the spokes at right angles, these sounds blended into a fierce, savage tune that vibrated responsive chords in his seaman's being.

Since six bells he had been on watch, listening to the lawless song of the sea, and except on two occasions, when the cabin boy emerged from the main companion, the decks had been deserted during this time.

At thought of The Boy the first mate felt a tinge of sympathy. Poor chap. Only seventeen. And shanghaied—But, after all, life was a rather grim affair; it had been none too kind to him. He—

Four bells jangled out. A moment afterward he saw the big body of Bjornsen, the second mate, emerge from the rear companion.

"Where's the captain?" inquired Cardigan, as the Norwegian, a great hulk of sunburnt physical manhood, reached his side and took the wheel.

A faint smile traced itself on the big blonde's face. "Below in his quarters, I suppose, sir—with a belly full of rum . . ."

Cardigan did not smile, merely nodded, saying, "Stearns will relieve you"—and moved down the ladder to the main companion.

Upon reaching Black Michael's door he entered without knocking. In the vague half-light supplied by the port-

hole he could make out the skipper's huge body sprawled full length in the berth. The odor of rum was heavy on the air.

"Captain!" he called, gripping one shoulder and shaking it. "Captain, wake up! . . . Hullo!"

The latter exclamation was brought forth as his hand accidentally brushed the cheek of the recumbent man. It was cold, clammy. He quickly felt the heart. An oath left his tongue.

He fumbled in the pocket of his pea-jacket and withdrew a box of matches. Igniting one he lit the slush-lamp and in the better light examined the body.

"Dead," he muttered to himself with a semi-professional air. "Two incisions—one just below the heart, the other above. . . ."

Though Cardigan was not yet thirty-five, there were times when he seemed at least forty. This was such an occasion. About his lips was a grim tightness, a truculence that suggested inflexible metal beneath the bronzed exterior.

"Struck in the dark, I'll wager," he said to himself, running his fingers through his gray-shot hair whilst he continued his investigation. "Dead about an hour or I'm . . . And *two* distinctly different instruments, one a straight blade, the other curved."

At one time he had studied surgery—in the days before the gray appeared in his hair. He . . . But that was an ancient story, a sheaf torn out of his life and laid away in a crevice of his memory.

After the first surprise caused by the discovery, he experienced a feeling that bordered on satisfaction. No love had ever existed between him and the master of the brig, and after The Boy was shanghaied at Melbourne there was open antagonism, a hostility that resulted in Cardigan's decision to leave the *Libertine* at the end of the return voyage.

So Black Michael was dead, he mused, murdered—

At this juncture his eyes, involuntarily lowered, were captured by a bright object on the floor. He stooped, picked it up and perceived that it was a small, curved blade—a murderous Malay knife that bore ugly stains. As he recognized it he felt a shock like nothing short of a volt of electricity—for the weapon was his own, a relic of the days before the gray appeared among his dark hairs.

There was a slim, dark-eyed Malay girl, down on the drowsy shores of the Archipelago where the restless surf drums to the tune of lawless love, and . . . But that, too, was an ancient tale, laid away in lavender with the other poignant recollections. She had given him the knife, this brown maiden, as she lay dying in his arms, and it was the only tangible remembrance of a still smouldering passion. . . .

His face settled into sterner lines. This was undoubtedly the blade with which the incision was made. But how had it been obtained from his cabin and why was it used? The most logical answer for both was: treachery.

His first impulse was to wipe the soiled blade upon his handkerchief, but he refrained, for Cardigan and discretion were synonymous. Blood-stains often proved incriminating.

No, innocent though he was, he decided, he dared leave no evidence where it might be discovered and used against him. This weapon was sufficient proof that he had an enemy aboard.

He first considered throwing the knife into the sea, but this proposed means of disposal he immediately dismissed; he would sooner separate himself from an arm than the weapon. He would hide it; there were many places on the ship where so small an object would never be found—and the place

that appealed to him as one less frequented was the paint-locker.

After covering the body with a sheet, he quitted the cabin, locked the door and made his way to the paint-locker. A moment later the Malay knife lay hidden behind a pile of cans and Cardigan went up on deck.

An impalpable mist was drifting in from the dark waste of waters, smoothing out the sharp lines of the *Libertine* and giving to her the look of a phantom craft as she rode the steadily increasing swell, her lights burning hazily, like nebula-belted planets in the fog.

Near the forward hatch Cardigan encountered Stearns, the midshipman, a sallow youth of twenty-one or less.

"Go below and send the hands aft, Mr. Stearns," the mate ordered, "every man Jack of them. . . ." Then he moved to the poop-deck where Bjornsen stood as one petrified at the wheel.

"Bjornsen," he began, "the captain has been murdered, stabbed twice. I have sent for the crew to notify them. I'm in command now and I want your hearty support."

The Norwegian nodded, his stolid face unaltered.

Five minutes later the crew was assembled below the poop, a nervous, shuffling crowd, looking up with uneasy eyes at the first mate. Scum of the East and West they were, washed together on the tides of the Seven Seas.

"Are they all here, Mr. Stearns?" inquired Cardigan of the midshipman, who was climbing to the poop-deck.

"All but the cabin boy, sir; he's down in the fo'c's'le drunk as—"

"I'll see him later," interposed the first mate. Then he cupped his hands about his mouth to make himself heard about the wind and sea. "Men, I'll be brief. A crime has been committed aboard this brig. Just before six bells I was in the skipper's quarters—and

when I returned a few minutes ago I found him dead—murdered.”

He paused to observe the effect of this announcement upon the men. Rows of sullen eyes looked up at him—eyes in which there was mingled fear and questioning. What a ghastly lot they looked, huddled there in the mist, thought Cardigan!

“One of you”—he made a sweeping gesture with his bronzed hand—“one of you killed him. And I’ve called you here to ask if the guilty man is willing to confess and thus lighten his punishment, or, in the event a confession isn’t forthcoming, if anyone knows anything that might be instrumental in locating the murderer.”

After a long silence England Charlie, third mate, a big, gaunt cockney, with a red face and red hands, spoke up: “You said one o’ us wus th’ murderer, sir, but ’ow d’ we know you didn’t croak ’im?”

At this there was a murmur from the men. Encouraged, the cockney continued. “You’d be th’ one to benefit by ’is snuffin’ it—an Hi arsk, ’ow d’ we know you didn’t send ’im orf?”

Cardigan met his gaze coolly and smiled.

“You’re justified in saying that,” he admitted. “But I was at the wheel from six bells to four bells—and if any man aboard understands post mortem conditions he can examine the body and see that the skipper has been dead just about an hour——”

“But you could ’ave lashed th’ wheel,” persisted English Charlie.

Cardigan’s jaw shot forward at an ugly angle. “Are you trying to accuse me, Charlie?” he demanded. There came no reply and he went on, “More than ever I’m determined to leave nothing undone to find the man who killed the captain—and as a first step every one shall submit to a search for evidence—now. I’m in command here

and I intend to assert my authority. Sykes, you and Stearns help me. Meanwhile, no one will leave the deck.”

As Cardigan started to descend the ladder he heard a savage oath, and, pausing, fastened his eyes upon the men.

“Did someone speak?” he rapped.

Ladd, a seaman, answered—“Jim Hickey here said he’d be damned if he was searched——”

“That’s a lie, sir!” broke in the bullet-headed mulatto, the great muscles in his arms standing out like whipcords.

Cardigan moved down and confronted the mulatto. “Did you say that?”

The boatswain, a Creole, stepped forward. “Eet ees so, m’sieur; I, ’Poleon Moncrief, hear’ heem. W’at ees more”—he cast a malicious glance at the mulatto, who stood with clinched fists, glaring at him—“I know w’y zat nigger he not want to be search’. I was een my bunk trying to go to sleep w’en ze cabanne boy he come below an’ drink a dan’ lot of rum. An’ w’en ze boy he fall asleep zat nigger he sink I not ’wake an’ get up an’ go to ze bunk of ze cabanne boy an’——”

A blasphemous oath left the mulatto’s thick lips. He made a move to spring at the Creole, but Cardigan placed himself between them.

“—He steal ze cabanne boy’s pay. I saw heem take eet from under ze mattress. An’ zat w’y he not want to be search’, m’sieur—because he know you fin’ too much money on heem.”

Cardigan turned upon the huge, brown-skinned figure.

“Is that the truth, Hickey? Aren’t you willing to be searched?”

The mulatto glared at ’Poleon Moncrief, spitting out a stream of vile oaths. “It’s a lie, sir; a damned, stinkin’ lie—made up by that——!”

With a quick, stealthy movement the Creole leaped around Cardigan and

flung himself at the mulatto's throat. Together they went to the deck, rolling upon the moist timbers.

As Cardigan stooped to separate them the mulatto freed himself by a sudden wrench and gained his feet, dashing along the deck toward the forward companion.

The first mate started in pursuit, but halted as his eyes fell upon a belaying pin that lay upon the deck not many feet away. Hastily arming himself with this formidable missile, he sent it spinning through the air after the fleeing figure. It caught the negro in the back of the skull; knocked him flat upon the deck planks.

Cardigan, followed by several of the crew, reached his side.

"He's out for some time," reported the first mate, bending over him. "Two of you lads carry him below and lock him up— But wait!"

He ran one hand into the rear pocket of the mulatto's trousers, producing a black leather wallet. Opening it he withdrew a wad of bills, which he swiftly counted and returned to the wallet.

He smiled grimly. "All right, men; below with him."

III.

IN the very midst of a dream The Boy was shot into consciousness. For a moment he could not remember where he was. He seemed to be caught in the teeth of a monster that shook him horribly, mercilessly. Half-remembered objects separated themselves from the chaos and he heard a distant voice pronouncing his name. Yet for some inexplicable reason he was unable to reply.

Gradually he extracted himself from the teeth of the monster; gradually objects settled into their regular places. Above him was, a familiar face. As he

recognized it sleep dropped from him as though severed by a blade.

"Get up," he heard Cardigan say, while he shook him vigorously.

The Boy lurched to his feet. As he brushed one hand across his lips he inhaled his breath, an odor that sickened him. Invisible hands seemed to jerk aside a drowsy fabric, revealing in their biting sharpness the incidents before his drunken sleep.

His soul shrank, dwindled with fear. Black Michael's body had been found and the mate had come to accuse him— But how did he find out? The only incriminating evidence, the knife, had been thrown into the sea. . . .

"I thought you promised me never to do this again," reproved Cardigan. "But we'll discuss that later. Come with me."

The Boy was dreadfully afraid. The blood pounded in his temples, beat so loudly that it seemed to boom out his guilt. God! How could he meet Cardigan's honest gaze—knowing in his heart that he had wielded the knife that finished Black Michael?

In some manner—he knew not how—he forced himself to follow the mate along the passage amidships and when they reached the cabin his fear increased to a panic as he perceived that Cardigan was making directly for Black Michael's quarters.

He stood with a rapidly pounding heart behind the mate while he inserted a key in the lock and turned it.

Within, the slush-lamp, turned low, threw quivering shadows upon the walls. The air was warm and unpleasantly heavy with the smell of stale rum. And there in the bunk it lay, covered with a sheet—The Thing.

Cardigan closed the door and turned the lamp higher. Mercy of God, thought The Boy, was he going to draw aside that sheet and . . .

"Boy," commenced the man, halting

beside the bunk. "I brought you here to show you this." And he turned back the sheet.

Something worse than horror reached up and clutched at The Boy's throat. He half closed his eyes; dared not shut them entirely, for The Thing fascinated him.

"The captain has been murdered," Cardigan continued. "A few minutes ago I happened on the fore-poop. I dropped a wallet and it fell overside—but fortunately caught in the projecting space under the bowsprit. And when I picked it up I found *this* with it—"

He withdrew an object from the pocket of his pea-jacket. A cry leaped to The Boy's lips—died.

There before him, sharp and ugly in the flickering glow of the slush-lamp, was the knife with which he killed Black Michael!

"Now come here," commanded the mate.

He obeyed, the cabin reeling dizzily about him. What use was there of trying to hide the truth now? Cardigan knew and—

"Look," was the sharp injunction.

And he looked . . . at The Thing on the bunk. As he saw the exposed chest a shriek of sheer terror was wrung from his throat.

"No, no!" he cried. "I didn't stab him twice—I didn't! Only once, in the dark . . . and then I ran—" He shuddered. "O, God, what have I said?"

With a broken sob he sank to his knees, burying his face in his hands. An instant later fingers closed over his shoulders and lifted him to his feet—fingers that were not rough but firm and determined.

"You said what I wanted to hear," announced Cardigan. "Look at me, boy. . . . There . . . Now, I'm going to question you and I want the

truth, the *truth*—before the God that you just called on. . . . When did you stab Black Michael?"

"A little after two bells, sir——"

"Why? Because he had mistreated you? . . . How did you do it?"

"I . . ." And there followed a stumbling, detached account of his movements from the time he left the deck until he surrendered to sleep in his bunk in the fo'castle.

"It's fortunate for you that I found the knife," remarked Cardigan when he had finished, "for it has your initials upon the hilt. I saw you come on deck twice while I was at the wheel; one time you went near the bowsprit but not until after I found the knife did I attach any importance to it." He paused, resuming after a moment. "It's quite evident that two people stabbed the captain—you and an unknown person. But who stabbed him first? Who is the *real* murderer? These are skeins that must be untangled. All I require of you is a close mouth and an open eye——"

"Then—then you're not going to lock me in the brig?"

"You are free; only remember my instructions—and regard them."

The Boy stared at him. He was dazed, stunned. Instead of a blow he had received kindness. *Kindness*. New and loftier emotions stirred within him; he tried to speak, to utter words that would convey his gratitude to the mate; he could only stand and stare mutely. Nor was that dumb look, mirroring his deepest and most profound emotions, unobserved by Cardigan: it came to him as an illuminating signal-flash from The Boy's soul.

"Now run along," he said, not unkindly, opening the door.

In silence The Boy passed out.

As he moved through the cabin, which was faintly lit by a hanging lamp, his brain groped in a labyrinth.

Some one else had sought to end Black Michael. Who was the owner of this other hand that had driven a blade into the skipper's breast? And which of the two had accomplished his purpose, he or the unknown person?

In his agony he prayed that it was the other, for though a short while ago The White Lotus had seemed a lamp that lighted the way to this ghastly action, he now saw, with the cold clearness of returned sanity, that with blood upon his soul he was severed from even spiritual companionship with this pallid leper-child who had impressed herself so deeply upon his memory.

But how could he ever find out? It all seemed very hopeless. . . .

As he neared the fo'castle he saw a vertical strip of yellow light cleaving the dark passage from the bulkhead door. Voices within were murmuring in hushed conversation.

He was almost in the opening when a sentence, flung against his ears with the sting of a whip, cemented him to the spot: "I only struck once, I tell you, *once*—yet there are *two* wounds. . . ."

Those words, spoken in a voice that was lowered to a tone just above a whisper, yet strangely familiar, brought forth his breath in a gasp.

He crept nearer the source of light; peered within.

The slush-lamp was turned low, casting flickering shadows as it swung with the motion of the brig. Five of the bunks were vacant; the sixth, near another bulkhead-door, opposite The Boy, was occupied.

Moncrief, the Creole, sat on the edge of the bunk, a cigarette between his thin, moist lips, and at his side, face and shoulders hidden by the boatswain's slender body, was another man. That bunk was used by the Chinese cook, The Boy knew, yet the one who lay there was not the Oriental.

They were talking again.

"By gar, eet ees ghastly, m'sieur," commented Moncrief.

"Yes—a ghastly failure," spat out the other. "Poleon"—a note of intensity came into the voice—"I see but one thing to do now. By four in the morning we should be near the coral reefs—they're just a mile off course. Wajo, the Polynesian, will be at the wheel; we can overpower him——"

"*Sacre* dam, m'sieur!" broke in the boatswain. "Do zat—*sat*?"

"Why not? To reach Tahiti means investigation by the authorities. If the brig goes down she carries all evidence with her. We can escape in the long-boat; islands are numerous along here——"

"But, m'sieur, ze knife of ze firs' mate zat you lef' in ze——"

"God knows what became of it! When he found the body he must have hidden the damned thing—and if I knew where . . . But no; I'm afraid to try it now. The second wound is what has scared me off; it's a sign to warn us." Then he swore a volley of oaths so vile that they burned The Boy's ears.

"With the captain killed," went on the voice, after a moment, "and the first mate disposed of by the incriminating evidence, we could have easily bought the crew over to us. With me in command we could have gone straight to Melbourne for the cargo of rum. McAllister would have paid well when we delivered it to him at Hiva-oa, for when his cursed natives have plenty of rum they do more work—and since the French government has restricted the— Oh, well, what's the use to talk of it? You got the best of the deal; I had the dirty work of killing the swine. It was too big an undertaking for two men to try——"

"But, m'sieur——"

"No, 'Poleon; the only thing to do now is save ourselves. . . ."

A pregnant dread was spreading through The Boy's body, a sensation of abysmal emptiness. The coral reefs; the Polynesian. Then they intended to—

Now he could learn who stabbed Black Michael first! But did he want to know? Yes, the truth was far better than horrible uncertainty. Yet he dared not enter the fo'castle alone; he must go and bring Cardigan.

As he turned to creep away a sudden plunge of the vessel sent him flat upon the deck of the passage with a sound that seemed loud enough to be heard from stem to stern.

He was almost on his feet when a lean figure appeared in the bulkhead door. Instantly he recognized Moncrief. He made a dive toward the lazarette, but the boatswain was too quick for him; he flung his lithe body upon him and bore him to the floor.

The Boy opened his lips to cry out and the Creole's fist descended upon his mouth. The pain stung him to action. With a desperate wrench he freed himself and fell against the bulkhead, but before he could move a second figure was momentarily silhouetted upon the light in the oblong aperture—a figure that hurled itself upon him, pinning him to the wall.

Again he tried to scream—again a fist bruised his lips horribly. He felt blood dripping from his chin.

"No, don't—" he cried, his mouth throbbing with pain. Something crashed down upon his skull and as he fell, plunging into what seemed a depthless abyss, a picture was photographed upon his brain—that of a dark, sinister figure silhouetted upon the glow in the bulkhead door.

Then the world reeled, a drunken universe—

IV.

A KNOCK on the door of his quarters brought Cardigan out of a light sleep. Sitting up on the edge of his bunk he called, "Come in!"

The opening of the door admitted a wavering blade of light and in the frame, outlined upon the pale illumination from the main cabin, was a form.

"It's Stearns, sir," announced the man. "I'm sorry to wake you up, but I have something queer to report."

Cardigan rose. "Wait a second till I make a light." Then a moment later when the slush-lamp cast its ill light upon his nearly-clad form he added, "All right, Stearns, what is it?"

The midshipman's sallow face seemed paler than ever; he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"I've seen something that I don't quite understand, sir," he began. "I had just been relieved by Wajo and was going toward the fo'castle when I happened to glance athwart the brig. I saw what looked like two shadows; then I realized they weren't shadows but *men*—two of them, moving along the port deck. They disappeared behind the after-cabin as soon as I saw them, but I got the impression that they were carrying something—or—or *some-one*. A minute later I could have sworn I heard a cry. It scared me a little, sir, after all that's happened on this hrig, so I hurried down in the fo'c's'le. I didn't know what to do—and after about an hour I decided to tell you."

"And you did right," commended Cardigan—for while the midshipman was telling his story something insidious had taken root in his brain, an alarming possibility that caused him no little apprehension.

"I'm going on deck," he announced, removing his pea-jacket and cap from

a peg on the wall. "Return to your quarters and say nothing to the men of what you've seen. . . ."

He followed Stearns into the poorly-lighted main cabin, and as the midshipman reached the top of the companionway, gripping the brass rail to keep from being hurled back by the dangerous roll of the vessel, the mate moved through the lazarette.

Midway in the dark passage leading into the fo'castle he collided with something that sprang away from him and swore lurid oaths.

"Who's that?" demanded Cardigan.

"Hinglish Charlie. 'Oo th' blurry 'ell's that?"

"The first mate. Is the cabin boy in the fo'c's'le?"

"No, sir; Hi ayn't seen 'im this evenin'."

"Well, help me look for him. You start at the bow and I'll go aft."

Together they passed through the main cabin and at the top of the companionway staggered out upon the deck, gripping the wet lee rail. Here they separated.

A blanket of fog had been dropped from the dark sky and the peak-gutters snarled and roared as the heavy sea, dashed inboard, was sucked back again to the surface.

Clinging to the drenched rail the mate moved aft. Near the long-boat amidships, a human form darted suddenly around the corner of the after-cabin and ran into him.

Cardigan was thrown roughly against the rail, and as he gained his balance the figure, head down, lurched past him toward the main companion.

"Who's that?" he bellowed, hollowing his hands.

For answer the figure plunged on; gained the companion; vanished.

Cardigan swore savagely. Moving across the slippery timbers, he reached the companionway and descended. Be-

low, in the main cabin, the door of the lazarette gaped at him.

With quick strides he made his way toward the fo'castle. The passage was not dark this time, for during the interval that he was on deck a light had been made in the crew's quarters and it sent a pale, trembling shaft through the bulkhead door.

In the entrance to the fo'castle Cardigan halted, an exclamation on his lips—for he stood face to face with English Charlie.

"How the devil did you get here?" he demanded suspiciously.

The cockney indicated the entrance opposite the bulkhead door, through which opening the bottom of a flight of stairs was visible. "I came down the steps, sir. I just stopped a minute to make a light 'ere."

"I thought I sent you to find the cabin boy."

"You did, sir—but Hi ayn't found 'im yet."

Cardigan whirled about and at that moment a voice behind him shrieked: "Two bells, mate—two bells. . . ."

The sound brought him around again and the cockney, grinning, pointed to a feathery green body perched on the upper tier of one of the bunks.

Cardigan swore as he made his way alone to the main cabin. Damn him, who was this fellow who had slunk past him on deck?

In the lazarette door he paused to consult his watch. Ten minutes to four. From the timepiece his eyes rose to the compass in the deck-beam overhead. He could distinguish the tiny figures on the white disc.

"Good God!" sprang from his lips. Who was on watch? Wajo—and the fool was headed off the course . . . toward where the coral traps lay—

He took a step to cross the main cabin and at that very instant—so exact is the time-table of Fate—a sudden

titanic shock hurled him flat upon his back. The fall partially stunned him, and as he lay there trying to marshal his scattered faculties the bow of the vessel seemed to leap up, rolling him against the cabin bulkhead. Following that loose objects tumbled down; glass shattered.

After a moment of struggle, Cardigan succeeded in getting to his feet. Finding himself in darkness, he realized that the lamp had been broken.

A splotch of misty light showed him the companionway, and, slipping and stumbling across the slanting floor, he groped his way to the foot of the stairs, where his outstretched hands found the brass rail.

He ascended. On deck charging billows broke in white foam over the gunwale, sweeping angrily against the cabins and masthead.

It seemed a deathless period to Cardigan before he reached the break of the poop; here he gripped the ladder and looked over his shoulder at the wreckage.

The bow was thrust up into the throat of the fog, the stern so deeply sunk that the main-chains dipped, while a list to the port permitted the sea free entrance through a tear in the bulwarks. She had evidently struck with tremendous force; the forward mast was down and the deck, below the fore-poop, in splinters, where broken spars had crashed through.

He grasped the situation instantly, realizing the urgency of keeping a cool head. The bows were jammed between the rocks and at any moment the wounded ship might slide back off the reefs—

His teeth snapped shut and he climbed the ladder. As he stood upright on the poop-deck, peering into the mist that masked the remote end of the vessel, a vague shape slid across the timbels at him. Instantly he saw that

it was a man and tried to steady himself for the encounter that he knew was unavoidable.

Instead of the jar that he expected, a smashing blow was delivered full in his face, and with mingled surprise and pain he realized that it was an attack rather than a collision. The moment he hit the deck he was up again, sending his fist into a yielding paunch. The figure went down without a cry, doubled in a knot.

For a moment Cardigan stood above his antagonist, waiting for him to rise; then, believing him rendered breathless by the blow, he bent over to ascertain the identity. He had no sooner abandoned his guard than he regretted it, for the knotted form straightened out and sprang at him—but not too swiftly for him to see the swarthy face of 'Pol-eon Moncrief.

"So you're the traitor aboard!" bel-lowed Cardigan. "You killed——"

Once more they came together. This time they clinched; went to the slanting deck, rolling over and over until they struck the rail, where the force of the impact separated them.

Leaping to his feet, Cardigan stood ready, and when the boatswain rose a well-aimed blow between the eyes sent him reeling against the gunwale. He crumpled up. The first mate bent swiftly and gripped him about the waist; lifted him and hurled him, clawing and kicking, overboard.

As the body of Moncrief was swallowed by the fog Cardigan staggered back against the wheel. His heel encountered an object, and looking down he saw the Polynesian, Wajo, stretched out beside the wheel grating.

He dropped on his knees to examine the body, and at this juncture someone scrambled over the break of the poop, looming tall and sinister in the mist.

"Mr. Cardigan?" The voice belonged to Stearns. "The whole bow's

smashed—clear to the main hatch! Who in the name of—” He stopped as a roll of the vessel sent him sliding across the wet deck.

“Grip yourself, man!” cried Cardigan, rising and moving to his side. “Remember, you’re midshipman on this brig! . . . Let’s make for the long-boat . . .”

The mate led the way from the poop to the long-boat, where a group of men, smeared of dark animation in the fog, were struggling at the davits. English Charlie’s voice rose above the clamor as he sang out orders.

“Did you find the cabin-boy, Charlie?” asked Cardigan, reaching the cockney, who stood with a dripping tarpaulin thrown over his shoulders.

“No, sir—an’ Hi looked from bow to stern!”

Poor beggar, thought Cardigan. His fears were confirmed. The two figures Stearns had seen in the mist loomed as sinister elements in the fate of the cabin-boy; the cry seemed conclusive evidence that evil had befallen him.

He gripped himself and ordered: “Charlie, send two men below to fetch provisions and blankets—and have them step lively!”

As two of the crew disappeared in the fog, headed for the companion, English Charlie drew himself into the life-boat.

“Everything in shape?” queried Cardigan.

“Aye, aye, sir! Oars, mast, canvas and water!”

“Is the rudder shipped properly? . . . Here come the provisions. In with them, men. . . . Get the lines clear and the boat ready to swing! One of you tail on the falls! . . . Lower slowly—slowly or you’ll swamp her! Stand by, lads! Now, ease off—ease off!”

Leaning over the slanting rail Cardigan saw the dark shape of the boat

plunge downward, saw it strike the sea and ride free of the hull, borne on a white surge. How small, how helpless it looked, down there in the mist, thought Cardigan.

“Are all hands there?” he called, as the last man shot down the line.

“All but the men for’ard, sir,” answered a voice from the misty smudge below. “They didn’t have a chance when she struck. . . .”

Cardigan, preparing to swing down the line, felt a peculiar reluctance to abandon the brig. Suppose, after all, the cabin-boy was somewhere—

A thought sped like steel through his brain. The Malay knife. He was leaving that behind. Queer that one should suddenly remember a fragment of sentiment amid such chaos—

“Lay her nose close in, lads!” he ordered over the rail. “I’m going to have a look below. If I’m not back in four minutes don’t wait. . . .”

He made his way to the companion, climbing down the almost inverted stairs into the main cabin, where the water reached his waist.

Trusting more to his sense of direction than his outstretched hands, he groped his way aft, beneath the decks, to the paint-locker. In the misty ghost-light that spilled through the nearly demolished deck above he found the nail-riven iron door and drew back the bolt.

With a shriek of hinges it swung out—spitting a large object in the waist-deep flood. Cardigan swore aloud as he perceived it to be a human body; bent over; lifted it; cursed again.

It was the cabin-boy—bound and gagged!

In the half-light he could see the mutely imploring eyes—dark pools of pain. With haste he secured the Malay knife and severed the bonds, afterward removing the gag from the bruised, swollen mouth.

“ . . . God, sir,” burst out The

Boy, "they knocked me in the head, 'Poleon Moncrief and another . . . I couldn't see his face, but he said—"

"Tell me later," cut in Cardigan. "We haven't time now; the ship's sinking. . . . Can you walk? . . . I'll help you. . . ."

The mate half-dragged The Boy along the passage and into the main cabin; here he set him on his feet and thrust him toward the vague gray light in the companionway.

As The Boy began the ascent, clinging to the rail, he heard a crash behind him, a ripping and splintering of broken timbers, and, looking back, he saw something long and dark, the shape of a spar, plunge from aloft and smite Cardigan on the head. With a splash the first mate sank beneath the ugly water in the cabin.

The Boy shrieked. For an instant he stood motionless, paralyzed, then stumbling down the stairs he groped in the flood for the body. Almost instantly he was rewarded. With trembling fingers he sought the heart. It was beating. He laughed hysterically and began to drag the limp form after him.

Midway up the companion-stairs he was brought to a standstill by a sound below, a half croak and half shriek: "On deck, you lubbers! . . . *Sahib hai!* . . ."

He understood. Kerachi, the parrakeet, was down there in that black hole—but he could not go back until he had carried Cardigan to safety.

A form suddenly blotted out the square of foggy gray light that defined the companion. Following that English Charlie's voice called, "Mr. Cardigan!"

"Here!" answered The Boy. "For God's sake take him! He was hit by a spar! . . . I've got to go back—after the parrakeet!"

As he turned to descend the cockney gripped his shoulder.

"Come back, yeh blarsted little fool! You'll be drowned—" But The Boy broke away and plunged down into the cabin.

A hush that seemed intensified rather than ruptured by the dull, ominous pounding of the waves against the sodden hull brooded in the bowels of the vessel—as if the very timbers of the stricken brig were smitten dumb with dreadful expectancy.

It corrupted The Boy with terror, this hush, but he forced himself to stagger through the water into the flooded passage amidships. Ahead, the bulkhead door hiccoughed yellow light. It gave warmth to his chilled soul, and in another instant he reached the entrance to the fo'castle.

The slush-lamp lay against the beam, spluttering feebly with every heave of the vessel. The foul hole was half-inundated and a great wound in the port bulwarks bled a steady stream of sea water.

"Kerachi!" called The Boy, searching in the flood for the little bird.

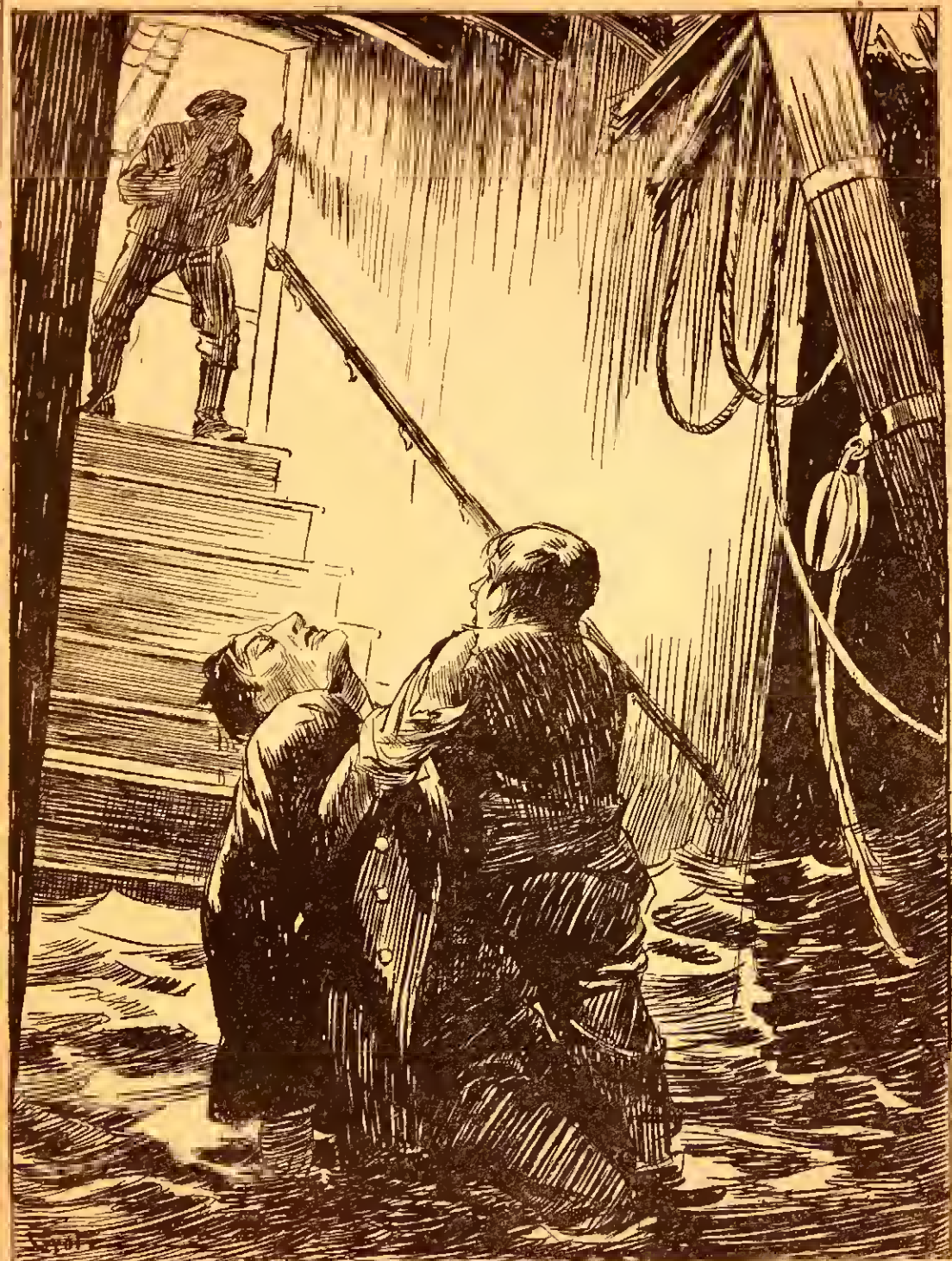
As if answering him, the parrakeet, perched upon the top of the furthest bunk, croaked: "*Chota hazri . . . sahibs. . . .*"

Then a thing occurred that drew The Boy's heart into his throat: a human hand rose suddenly from behind an overturned table that floated near the second bulkhead door . . . clawed at the air . . . sank.

"Help . . ." pleaded a faint voice. "A spar . . . pinned me here . . . in the passage door. . . . I'm killed unless. . . ."

The blood in The Boy's veins seemed for the moment sucked up. The voice! Pain had weakened it to scarcely above a whisper, but he recognized it, this voice that he would remember until Death wiped free his brain.

"I'm coming!" he answered, suffused with fright and joy.



"Here!" answered The Boy. "For God's sake take him! He was hit by a spar!"
—Page 110

As he moved forward a sudden lurch of the brig sent the lamp crashing against the bulkhead. He stumbled; clutched at something tangible; clung. With a sense of aching despair he realized that he was denied the sight of—

Darkness had hardly shut its jaws upon the foul hole when the parrakeet shrieked: "Two bells, mate, two bells. . . ."

An instant of frightful silence came on the heels of the bird's speech, then: "God, how did you know?" shrilled the voice. "That was when I stabbed him. . . . As I pulled the knife out two bells struck. . . ."

The Boy felt a sudden quiver of the planks beneath his feet, heard a ripping sound forward . . . and a sudden convulsion of the water flung him backward. Terrified, he regained his balance and groped until he found and pulled himself through the bulkhead-door.

How he made the main cabin he never knew. After a period of breathless struggle, bruised and hurt, almost strangled by the deepening flood, he reached the foot of the now inverted companion-stairs and began to climb.

He was almost at the top when a great wave, hurled through the companion above, descended upon him and bore him, gasping and choking, into the liquid blackness below.

The world swung around in giddy chaos. He experienced a terrible plunging sensation; torrents of delirious water passed over him; pitiless night swirled its black currents about his struggling body.

Buoying himself upward, battling against the legions of water, he strove to attain the surface. His thrashing arms struck something hard. At the contact his body went rigid with horror.

The ceiling of the cabin. Trapped.

A fierce exultation possessed him—the glory of struggle. He tried to fight,

but the liquid death crushed him. He screamed—was choked. He knew the torture of suffocation, a seemingly endless period of terror and pain such as he had never known, even when the lash of Black Michael curled about his bare skin; and a vivid, blinding flash of the concentrated events of many years leaped like hundred-hued lightnings athwart his drowning eyes.

In the midst of this glow, surrounded by tiny reeling stars, he saw The White Lotus . . . burning with the fire of palest moons—a figure that faded, became as destroyed moonlight, a vanishing glory that perished the very instant that it flashed to light his way.

"Ia ora na i te Atua. . . ."

Dark sluice-gates closed upon him.

V

"'ERE she goes, mateys—look!"

That was the first thing that Cardigan heard, a sentence that clove the fabric of unconsciousness and left him lying, pained to the soul, in what seemed a vast, misty cavern.

He felt intermittent sprays upon his face and tried to struggle to a sitting position, but an intense burning in his skull made him fall back. He opened his lips.

"Charlie . . . where are you?"

An instant afterward a huge face, seeming wraithlike in the fog, materialized in the dusky vacancy above him.

"She's just gone down, sir!" the third mate said in a husky voice. "Gawd, it was orful . . . with the little fool aboard—"

"You mean—?"

"Yerss. 'E dragged you up the companionway and Hi 'elped lower you into the long-boat. . . . We'd 'ardly got away, sir, when she went back orf the rocks . . . straight down." He paused, then: "Shall Hi call the roll, sir?"

Cardigan shuddered involuntarily.
"Yes."

He saw English Charlie rise; his head was lost in the mist.

"Watkins!" began the Britisher.

"Here!"

"Sykes . . . Ladd . . . Cheng
Su . . . Olsen . . . Huldricksson
. . . Hickey—"

"The nigger was locked in the brig,"
put in a voice from the rear.

"Stearns!" went on the cockney.
"Moncrief—"

"He went overboard. . . ." This
from Cardigan in a half-whisper.

Then, "Bjornsen. . . ."

But Bjornsen did not answer. Nor
could anyone account for the big Nor-
wegian.

Cardigan went to his grave wonder-
ing who had struck Black Michael first,
'Poleon Moncrief or The Boy.

And perhaps the spirit of Bjornsen,
knowing this and possessing a grim
sense of humor, chuckled.

But do dead men laugh?





He flung open the door, and Beau Nash, his eyes wide and staring, came in
—Page 124

The Mystery of the Marseilles Express

By J. C. Kofoed

I

THE card they found in his pocket read:

EUGENE BERTAL
INGENIEUR D'CHIMIQUE
COURS BELSUNCE, MARSEILLES

He was lying in a first class compartment of the Paris-Marseilles express, his throat cut from ear to ear. The only other occupants of the carriage were a blind man and a gentle old lady of eighty, who was hysterical from shock.

II

THE Rue Cannabiere is at once the Broadway and the Boulevard des Italiens of Marseilles, and it is more cosmopolitan than either. Between the big stores, the glittering cafés, restaurants and theaters that flank its width, walk yellow men from China, brown from India, black men from Bermuda or the Soudan, Arabs, Portuguese, Italians and Yankees. Turban and fez are as common on the Cannabiere as silk stockings and painted lips.

William F. Bailey, special agent for the Department of Justice, sat in a corner of the Restaurant Haxo, absorbed in a magnificent omelette and a cup of chocolate. The warm June sun sprayed through the windows, lacing floor and furniture with thongs of gold. From the window he could see the Vieux Port, with its bristle of masts. His unopened

copy of the *Matin* was propped against a cruet on the center of the table.

Bailey had been in France a year, seeking "Beau" Nash, who was wanted in the United States on a dozen charges. Nash was of the highest type of criminal, but a man who had made enemies gratuitously. He kicked out of his path men who had enabled him to make a success of his nefarious calling. But even with information from a number of these Bailey had been unable to trace the old fox. "Railroad" Cartwright had failed to "get" the Beau in his day—failed, with a great incentive to urge him on; and so had a dozen others.

The agent thought of the words of Eddie Lenoir, when that disconsolate forger was last arrested:

"It ain't no use," Eddie had said; "things have got so with the wireless an' cables an' international police that there ain't nowhere in the world a man can go where a red-faced Irishman with a badge won't tap him on the shoulder an' say, 'Hello, Eddie, the old man wants to see you.' Only one bird's got you dicks stopped, an' that's Beau Nash."

Bill recalled, with a grin of disgust, his answer, "Oh, we'll get him all right. It's only a matter of time."

He had had a year, and from all indications was no closer to his quarry than when he started. Well, if Denise Girard, whom he loved, married him, Bailey could hardly call his European trip a failure, even though it might seem so in the eyes of his superiors.

The chatter of two men, drinking wine at a nearby table, annoyed him. One was tall and gaunt; the other stoop shouldered, slack chinned, pinched. Bailey, subconsciously, had heard the entire conversation. Apparently the big man was berating the other rather too harshly for that gentleman's taste. He wound up with a gust, "Name of a dog, but you are a fine one to call yourself a railway man. Not all the way did I see you—lazy lizard—"

The little man sprang up, with a snarl at the edge of his lips. Then he glanced around, hesitated, and after a moment slouched out.

Bill yawned, and picked up his paper. In a flash his bored air dropped from him, and he stiffened with amazement. It was not the headlines telling of the death of Monsieur Bertal, but the fact that the dead chemist's photograph was that of Beau Nash!

It required just two minutes for the agent to pay his bill and leave the Restaurant Haxo. The Prefecture of Police was only a short distance away, but fifty Frenchmen shrugged their shoulders and exclaimed anent the mad hurry of Americans as Bailey dashed by.

The prefect greeted him politely. Of a certainty the body was in the mortuary, and if Monsieur Bailey desired to view it there could be no possible objection. It also happened that the two occupants of the compartment at the time of the murder were in the prefecture, and it would be possible to speak with them. It was hoped that the distinguished American secret agent might aid them in this case.

Bailey followed a glum gendarme down a corridor to the room where the unfortunate flotsam of the city so often paid their final visits. There was something on one of the slabs—a rigid something covered with a white cloth. The agent turned down one corner of the sheet, and then replaced it. His search

was ended. The lean face and drooping mustache, the graying yellow hair—It was Beau Nash beyond a doubt!

"You recognize him, monsieur?" asked the prefect, who had followed Bailey into the mortuary.

The American told him.

"It is not surprising to me. There is a chemical engineer named Bertal, who resides in Marseilles, but we learned that he is at home, having returned from Paris last night. And now, monsieur, if you will come with me to the office we will speak with Madame Berthier, who was in the compartment at the time of this man's death."

Madame Berthier, a delicate little lady of eighty, told Bailey, in a frightened voice, all she knew of the affair. No one in their senses could have suspected her, but the frightful experience had shaken her to the soul.

"We had passed Lyons, monsieur," she explained. "It was late, nearly two in the morning. I was dozing. Monsieur Bertal was asleep in the corner directly opposite me; the blind man, Monsieur Robert, was beside him. The door of the compartment had been locked after we left Lyons. There was a young woman wearing a heavy veil in the next compartment when we left Paris. The police found no one else in the car but us when they investigated."

She stopped, and covered her face with her quivering hands.

Bailey patted the old lady's shoulder reassuringly, and after a moment she continued:

"I don't know what time it was when I woke up. The lights cast only a dim blue haze over the compartment. I was a little dazed at first. I rubbed my eyes, and saw—saw Monsieur Bertal. He was sitting up very straight, his head tilted back against the cushion, his eyes staring at the ceiling. Then I saw the slash across his throat, and the b-blood soaking his shirt and vest. I screamed—and

screamed. Monsieur Robert woke up, and asked me what was the matter. But I fainted—

"A peculiar case," said the prefect; "we have absolutely no clue. If monsieur would help—"

Bailey nodded. "I'll be glad to. It is necessary for me to cable the chief at once, but I will return and do all I can. Though I hope we can catch the murderer of Beau Nash, he has certainly done the world no harm in ridding it of that gentleman."

Once more on the Rue Cannabiere, the American paused. He would probably be ordered home very shortly, and in the short time left him he would have to persuade Denise to marry him and accompany him to America.

Though he had known the girl for almost a year, he knew little or nothing of her family and antecedents. She was very beautiful, apparently had sufficient money for all her needs, was well educated and well bred. Also, she found it necessary to make trips to Paris every two weeks. That completed Denise Girard's dossier so far as William Bailey was concerned.

It was sufficient that he loved her.

He walked as far as the Cours Saint Louis. There he swung aboard a tram-car, and after fifteen minutes' ride dropped off opposite the marble grandeur of the Palais Longchamp. Denise's apartment was very near.

Pondering there in the June sunshine as to the best course he should pursue, Bill Bailey received the greatest shock of his eventful life.

Denise came down the steps of her house, arm in arm with Beau Nash!

The drooping mustache, the graying yellow hair was that of the corpse who lay on the slab in the mortuary of the prefecture of police. And who could doubt from the stately and dangerous walk, from his eyes—so ice-cold, so fire-hot—from his deadly air of a bravo of

fortune, that Nash was very sure of himself.

Apparently the pair did not see him. They walked down the street, talking earnestly. Bailey shook off his numbed surprise, and followed them. A question kept hammering in his brain. What was Denise doing with the Beau? What possible connection could his little sweet-heart have with the most notorious criminal in Europe?

III

BAILEY could have arrested Nash then and there, but the human instinct to find out what Denise was doing with this man overrode his first impulse to take the fellow into custody. They were in no hurry, made no effort at concealment, and Bailey, sheltered by the flowing stream of pedestrians, kept within easy reach of them.

At length they turned into the Place Moreau. It was market day, and even though late in the afternoon, the square was crowded. Sabots clattered on the cobble-stones; hogs squealed, ducks squawked; red-faced peasant women shouted prices for their fish and fowl and vegetables. Here wandered a steel helmeted poilu or a brown Tommy, there a pigeon-chested gendarme, flecks of color in the dull mass.

As Bailey started to cross the square three men stepped in his path. They were Parisians, of Montmartre or the outer boulevards. The cut of their clothes, a swagger from the hips and an unhealthy color proved that. They stopped him effectively without apparently attempting such a thing.

"Hello, American," whined one. "We desire only the small courtesy of a match."

"I'm in a hurry," Bailey snapped, thrusting the spokesman to one side. "Get out of the way."

Every bit of color fled from the

apache's face; his lips tightened into a white gash, and there was such malignant hatred in his eyes that Bailey's hand involuntarily reached toward his hip. If ever murder was written in a human expression it was there in the Frenchman's. Then the agent laughed, reached over and grasped the fellow's wrist and twisted it until he howled with pain. The others, being cowards at heart, surged back. Bailey hurried across the square. But in the moment the Parisians had engaged his attention, Nash and Denise had disappeared.

Bailey was not a man to cry over spilt milk, but he was thoroughly disgusted at the turn affairs had taken. Much as he wanted to allow Nash further liberty so that he could discover the relationship between him and Denise it had become imperative to get the man under lock and key.

He telephoned to Captain Goulet, the prefect. It was Bailey's plan to have a drag-net thrown around the city in the event of Nash's attempting to slip out, and also to have the Place Moreau quarter thoroughly searched at once.

"Yes?" came Captain Goulet's voice over the wire.

"This is Bailey."

"Oh, Monsieur Bailey, I have the most—"

"Just a moment, Captain. You remember that I identified the man who was murdered on the Marseilles express as Beau Nash. Shortly after leaving your office I saw Nash on the street, but he gave me the slip—"

"You—you saw Nash on the street?" asked the captain thickly. "Oh, mon Dieu! This matter is getting beyond our mortal bonds."

"What do you mean?"

"The body of the man you identified as Nash has disappeared from the table in the mortuary!"

Bailey sucked in his breath in a gasp of surprise.

"Disappeared?"

"Of a certainty."

"And I saw Nash in the street five minutes afterward. I wonder—"

"Did you—did you notice his *throat*, monsieur?"

"He wore a muffler," said Bailey impatiently, "wrapped in two or three folds around his neck."

"Then it was him," wailed the prefect. "I fear nothing human, monsieur, but this has gotten beyond our realm. The man who lay on this table was as dead as Pontius Pilate—to that I'll swear. Yet he disappears from my mortuary, and you meet him on the street. What can one do against a cadaver, monsieur?"

"Nonsense. Have all the stations and wharves watched, and send a dozen men down here to search the neighborhood. Dead or alive, we're going to get Beau Nash. And I think that he will be able to tell us a few things to clear up the mystery of the Marseilles express. Will you do as I ask?"

"At once, monsieur."

Bailey thoughtfully hung up the receiver, and walked again into the Place Moreau.

The shadows had lengthened. The hucksters in the square were packing up their stands and wares. In ten minutes more the place would be deserted, and then the police would come down like the historic Assyrian wolves—probably with as small success.

Looking up from his musings, Bailey saw Denise step out of a *taverne* on the farther side of the square. She looked around cautiously. Then, having reconnoitered the ground to her evident satisfaction, she went back into the house. Bailey ran across the street, shifting his revolver from his hip pocket to the side one of his coat.

The entrance from which Denise had looked did not lead through the café, but directly up a flight of stairs to the second floor. Its door was unlocked,

and the agent pushed it open and went in.

No one there.

With his hand on the butt of his weapon, Bailey went up. Under his cautious step the ratty old stairway squeaked like an unoiled hinge. The place was dark as a well, and rank with the thousand odors of a cheap restaurant. Somewhere above lay the key to the most puzzling mystery that Bailey had ever investigated.

At the head of the second flight a gas jet burned blue in the foul air. Within the arc of its sickly radiance the portal of a room swung slightly ajar. He tiptoed forward, and urged the door open an inch or more. Every muscle in his body was tensed for the possible struggle.

Peering into the room, he caught the darker hulk of a bed in the gloom. From the arrangement of the bed-clothing it looked as though someone were sprawled on it. But, strain his ears as he might, Bailey could not hear that person breathing.

Moving with the greatest caution, the agent slipped through the door. A gas light, turned very low, was burning. His pistol clutched in his right hand, Bailey stretched out his left, and turned on the gas full blast.

There on the bed, its head slewed around until the throat-gash yawned like some horrid mouth, lay the body of the man who had been killed on the Marseilles express!

IV

BAILEY went cold to the tips of his fingers at the horror of it. He was used to ghastly scenes, but none had ever affected him as did the lonely figure on the disordered bed. If it wasn't Nash, who was it, and why had he been brought from his slab in the mortuary to this place?

The agent stepped toward the bed, and then a strong hand reached over his shoulder and tore away the pistol. Another was clapped over his mouth. So quickly was the attack made that before Bailey could shout or struggle he was on his back, his own handcuffs on his wrists, and a gag between his teeth.

The apache who had accosted him in the square grinned down at him.

"Ah, vieux cochon," he snorted, "you are the trapped and not the trapper now. Of course, you understand that we are going to kill you. But first, by order of Monsieur Nash, I am to explain some things to you. He thought it a shame that you should die without first touching the edges of this mystery. Look."

He walked to the bed, and Bailey's sidelong glance followed him.

"This man's name is not unfamiliar to you, monsieur," said the apache. "It is John Sheppard, known as a cousin to Monsieur the Beau. The resemblance between the two is strong, but you will grant that the make-up is yet the work of a master-hand. The nose, see, it has been filled out with paraffin. The hair and mustache are dyed. This bluish scar at the angle of the jaw has been made with an electric needle."

Of course, Bailey knew of Johnny Sheppard, who had been almost as notorious in his sphere as the Beau was in his. It was more than probable that Sheppard had consented to this disguise to throw the police off his cousin's track. It accounted, anyway, for the widely varying reports of Nash's whereabouts that had come to the agent's ears.

The apache continued. "Monsieur Nash intended dispatching you, of course, who is the chief thorn in his side. He was afraid, however, that a more complete examination be made of Sheppard, with the consequent working back of your death to him. We were instructed to get the body. It was absurdly simple. We drew the gendarmes

to the front of the prefecture by a false alarm. The mortuary faces on an alley, where we had a covered wagon. You see, it was so easy that even you might have done it."

Bailey lay very still, hoping that the Frenchman, in his streak of garrulous boasting, might say still more. But the fellow had apparently fulfilled his instructions. He drew his revolver, and looked curiously down at the agent.

"They say Americans know how to die," he observed casually. "We will see."

Bill stiffened, but he kept his eyes fixed on the other's yellow orbs. It was hard to die there, with so much of life before him, but the least he could do was to keep up a bold front. They wanted to see him wince, and he did not intend giving them that satisfaction.

The thug lifted his weapon, and his comrades crowded up, their rat faces glistening. Bailey's fingers tightened, and his lips drew down in a hard line as he tensed himself for the shock—

A revolver exploded; another followed. Two of the Parisians fell. Their leader plunged for the open, and a huge, gray-haired gendarme deliberately shot him in the back. The apache spun around, and rocketed down the steps, to lie, an unkempt heap, at the bottom.

When Bailey was liberated he dashed downstairs and propped the dying man on his knee. There was much that the fellow could tell him if he would.

"Nom d'un nom!" the apache groaned. "I'm going . . . To think that a rotten gendarme should get me at last . . ."

"Who killed Sheppard?" Bailey demanded.

"He paid us . . . five hundred francs . . . Zut! Five hundred francs, and I haven't spent a damned sou . . ."

"Who killed Sheppard?"

The Parisian rolled his pale eyes upward. "Parbleu! I'll tell. Why not? I got five hundred francs to finish you,

and I haven't spent a centime . . ." He sat up suddenly. "Be watchful of Bertal," he gasped; "they are going to kill him." Then his head sagged back, and he died very quietly in Bailey's arms.

"They are going to kill Bertal!" The dead man's warning rang in Bailey's ears. What had the man Bertal, whose card had been found in the corpse's pocket, to do with this affair? Just where did he fit into the distorted mosaic? The agent had known that the presence of Bertal's card in Sheppard's pocket could hardly have been due to chance. But he had had no time to investigate any of the little clues he had caught out of the tangled skein. Now his time would be further occupied in preventing some one from exterminating the unhappy Monsieur Bertal.

Bailey rose from his knees to find the gray mustached gendarme regarding him quizzically.

"I have under arrest," said Sergeant Meaux, "a woman named Denise Girard. We found her on the third floor."

Bailey's voice was normal when he asked, "On what charge are you holding her?"

"She has confessed to the murder of the man who was found on the Paris-Marseilles express."

"Nonsense!" said Bailey violently.

"Perhaps not, monsieur. She is quite positive in expressing herself. And, after all, it would not be the first woman who resorted to murder. It was a wise man who first said, '*Cherchez la femme*.'"

Bailey stood silent, eyes on the ground. It was absurd to believe that his sweet girl had committed so shocking a crime. She had confessed. Bah! What the devil was a confession? Many an innocent person had confessed before this. But ugly doubt reared its head. Why was she so apparently friendly with Beau Nash? Why—

Bailey believed it would be better not

to see Denise just then. He wanted time to get a clearer vision of the affair; to make a few investigations. So in company with a gendarme, he hurried into the street, and caught a tram-car in the direction of the Cours Belsunce.

A fog had settled down in earnest, wiping out the tops of the buildings, and making the street lights mere gray smudges in the darkness. He found Monsieur Bertal's house with difficulty, posted his gendarme outside, and rang the bell.

The Bertal apartment was on the ground floor, as the neat brass plate under the window testified. Monsieur himself opened the door a crack, and looked rather suspiciously at his visitor. Then he bowed, and said:

"Come in, Monsieur Bailey."

Bailey had not the faintest idea of how Eugene Bertal knew him, but he kept his wonder hidden and he and the gendarme walked in.

Old Bertal might just have stepped from a painting, with his high collar, white shirt front and neck cloth with its pleats and counterpleats. He made Bailey think of English inns, with roaring fire-places and guests thumping in from the lumbering coaches—of fat turkeys, egg nogg, toddy and the rest. In appearance he was a man after Dickens' own heart—not the puffy French chemical engineer he was supposed to be. The room itself furthered that impression.

There was a huge four-poster bed, with chintz curtains; there was an ancient mahogany bureau, quaint brass candelabra, fine old engravings on the walls, rows of leather bound books. There were also big, helpless looking wadded chairs. The host waved his guest toward one of them.

Bailey sat down. "You know me apparently, monsieur, or else you are an extraordinarily good guesser. If that is the case, possibly you can guess why I am here."

A bleak look came into the old man's face. He nodded.

Bailey heard the creak of cautious footsteps in the next room. He knew that old Bertal lived alone, and that in all probability the newcomer was the messenger of death.

It was pitch dark beyond the portieres, but Bill seemed to sense a blacker shape flattened against the opposite wall. Without an instant's hesitation, he flung himself, muscular hands outstretched at the intruder, while he shouted to Monsieur Bertal to turn on the light.

He crashed against an athletic body, and received a vicious blow in the face. They clenched, and in the struggle tore a handkerchief from his opponent's face, but it was too dark for recognition. Bertal was taking an exasperatingly long time in reaching the electric switch.

Then someone struck Bailey from behind. He reeled back, loosening his hold. The intruder tore himself free, flung open the door, and clattered out through the hallway. Bertal turned on the lights. There was no one in the room save these two.

In the street the gendarme raised an enormous pother as he ran after the fellow, but Bailey did not aid him. He simply stood and looked at Bertal.

"An explanation would not be out of place," he said coldly. "I risked my neck for you, and then you try to break it."

"That is my affair," said Bertal sullenly. "And now, we will get the principal business of your visit over and done with. I know why you—a detective—are here, and I confess freely. I killed John Sheppard on the Paris-Marseilles express!"

He opened a drawer in the table, and took out a knife, with a clotted blade.

"This is what I did it with," he said.

When the gendarme returned, panting, and with nothing to show for his

chase, Bailey left him in charge of the apartment, and took Bertal to the prefecture of police. He had not commented on Denise's confession. He said nothing concerning this one.

Captain Goulet smiled grimly when the American explained that Bertal had shouldered responsibility for the murder. He shook his finger reprovingly, as though the old chemical engineer were a bad, bad boy.

"It is strange, very strange, Monsieur Bailey," he said, "and, as you Yankees say, brisk business, eh. First Mademoiselle Girard confesses, then Monsieur Bertal, and just five minutes ago Monsieur Robert, the blind man, sent for us, and said that he alone was responsible for Sheppard's death. Now, who is really telling the truth?"

V

"TAKE Monsieur Bertal to a cell," the prefect directed a gendarme. "I would like to know, Monsieur Bailey, just where we stand in this matter.

The Department of Justice man grunted. "So would I. As S. Holmes used to say, 'It is a capital mistake to theorize before we have all the data.' I am going out to get that data. Did you instruct the Chef de Gare to hold the murder car for my investigation, and also keep the entire train crew so I can interview them?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now, we'll have the three confessors come out here one at a time, and tell us in detail just how they committed the crime. After that I'll examine the car and the crew, and if that doesn't get us some real information, I'll go back to kindergarten."

Goulet nodded his approbation.

"Bring in Mademoiselle Girard," he directed.

Bailey promptly effaced himself from the scene by retiring behind a conve-

nient screen, where he could see and hear without being observed himself.

Denise came in presently, her beautiful face white and tear stained. There were blue circles beneath her eyes, and her slender shoulders drooped. Bailey's heart went out to her in a warm surge of love and pity. She was so young, and so much in need of help.

"Now, Mademoiselle Girard," said the prefect in a normal conversational tone, "I want you to give me a straightforward description of what happened on the Paris-Marseilles express last night."

"I—I told you once."

"It is necessary that it be repeated."

He tapped his teeth with a penholder and looked at her quite calmly.

"Before we started from Paris," she said hurriedly, "Sheppard, whom I knew, spoke to me insultingly. After we passed Lyons I thought I heard an exclamation of pain from the next compartment. I rose and went into the corridor. The door to the compartment was open. Sheppard seized me and drew me in. I—I knew what sort of a man he was, and, having a knife in my girdle, I pulled it out and struck blindly. He fell back on the seat, and I ran into my own compartment."

"How is it that Madame Berthier and Monsieur Robert heard nothing of this?"

"There were no words passed—little noise. They were both sleeping."

"You assume full responsibility for this man's death?"

"I—I do," she whispered.

"That is all," said Goulet, motioning the gendarme to take her away. "Bring in Monsieur Robert," he added.

"He has nothing to do with it—truly, truly he hasn't," the girl cried desperately over her shoulder.

When the blind man was led in the prefect addressed the same questions to him.

"I had every reason to hate that man,"

answered Robert. "It is not necessary to explain motives—my confession obviates that. Sheppard felt safe with me because I am blind. I could tell by his breathing when he was asleep. When I was sure of it I felt for his throat—oh, so cautiously—and then used my knife."

"What were your relative positions?" asked Bailey, coming from behind the screen.

"He was sitting next the window, I beside him."

Bailey nodded gravely.

After the blind man was taken away Bertal was brought back again. He was visibly nervous.

"We want a detailed explanation from you," Bailey explained.

"It will be brief. Long ago I had—for reasons that need no explanation—determined on the death of John Sheppard. He deserved it if ever a man did, but it was out of the question for me to kill him openly. I knew that he intended leaving Paris when he did. I knew exactly how the train ran; the track it used, its schedule, how it always came to a brief stop in the freight yards beyond Lyons. I learned what compartment Sheppard would occupy. Then I hid myself in a freight car beside the track used by the express. Fortune was kind to me—kinder than I expected. The train halted. I looked, and there, directly opposite me, I saw Sheppard asleep. I leaned across, resting my arm on the side of the express, and drove my knife into his throat. Then I walked back to Lyons, and two hours later caught another train to Marseilles."

When Bertal had been escorted back to his cell, Captain Goulet looked quizzically at Bailey.

"The further we go the more tangled we get," he observed. "Mon Dieu! What a fright I had when the body disappeared from the mortuary. I thought surely we had a ghost to deal with. But

these are most palpably human folks, and each of their confessions are logical when taken alone. Together—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll straighten them out," Bailey reassured him. "I'm off now, and I won't be back until I've laid my hands on something definite."

It was not until nine o'clock next morning that Bill returned, but he was as fresh and clear eyed as though he had been sleeping all night. Captain Goulet greeted him hopefully.

"I've made some progress," the agent admitted in answer to the prefect's question. "In fact, most of the mystery has disappeared. If you will have the three prisoners brought in again I think we can get the other phases cleared up."

Bill flashed Denise a look that brought the color to her cheeks, and a faint smile in answer to his.

"The three of you," he said, "have confessed to the murder of John Sheppard. There are some angles to this case that I don't know, but I know that none of you had a hand in Sheppard's death. In the first place, Mademoiselle Girard had absolutely nothing to do with it. She *was* on the train, but she left it at Dijon. I wired her description to the police at every stop the express made, and found that she registered at Dijon under the name of Madame Claire St. Pol. Isn't that true, Denise?"

"Y-yes," she admitted.

"Now, as to Monsieur Robert. His story was plausible. I carefully examined the spot where Sheppard had been sitting. There was a slash in the cushion, and spots of blood. But the nature of the cut, which was deep on the side toward Robert, and edged thinly toward the window, indicated that it had been made by someone outside the train. There were also drops of blood on the steps which conclusively proved

that point. So, of the three confessionaires, it seemed most likely that Monsieur Bertal was the guilty party."

The chemist nodded dully.

"As a matter of fact," Bailey continued, "he had no more to do with Sheppard's death than the other two. He declared that he had committed the crime while the Marseilles express halted in the freight yard beyond Lyons. As a matter of fact, the train did not stop. There was a clear track, and the express maintained a speed of thirty miles an hour through the yards. Hence, it was impossible for Bertal to have done as he claimed. Besides, Monsieur Bertal did not leave his hotel in Lyons until after the express had passed. I learned from his housekeeper the hotel he usually stayed at in that city, and found that he was aroused at five o'clock in the morning, had breakfast, and left at six. That, I think, eliminates him."

"Then who in the name of heaven," burst out the puzzled Goulet, "killed John Sheppard?"

"That will come out presently," said Bailey. "Just now I have a surprise for you."

He flung open the door, and Beau Nash, his eyes wide and staring, not a fleck of color in his face, came in!

"There's no use stalling," he panted. "She didn't kill him. I— I—why, I killed Johnny Sheppard myself!"

Bill Bailey laughed.

"That confession is the finest thing you ever did, Beau—the only clean, honest thing in your whole black record. But it won't wash. You didn't kill Johnny Sheppard any more than I did myself!"

VI

THE Beau's thin lips twitched like a snarling dog's. "Damn you!" he shouted. "I tell you I did. You're not go-

ing to railroad *her* to the guillotine."

"Of course not," soothed Bailey. "I'm not in the habit of railroading people. I know you fairly well, Nash, and I thought that telegram would do the trick. You see, folks, I sent a wire, signed by one of the Beau's apache friends, telling him that his sweetheart, Mazie Lee, had been arrested for this murder, and that she would be railroaded. As a matter of fact, Miss Lee is already on her way to England."

Nash grated his teeth. "You devil."

"It won't do any good to indulge in personalities. I know who the murderer is, and I'll produce him very shortly. Before I do, I want to clear up all the threads. I suppose everyone knows that the Beau is a member of a most respected family in Sussex, England. He organized the London Bank Gang, and later operated extensively in the United States. Sheppard, his cousin, was also a member of that gang. Now I want you, Denise, to tell me why you helped him, and why you confessed to Sheppard's murder."

The girl looked at Nash, paled, and then said bravely, "I was afraid that my father had killed him, as he had often threatened to do, and I wanted to protect him."

"Your father?" said Bailey questioningly.

Denise made a gesture toward Monsieur Robert, the blind man.

"Nash and Sheppard had my father in their power. I aided them whenever they demanded it to save him. They treated me brutally at times, but I never dared resent it. When Sheppard was killed I believed that father did it. The thought was natural, for he was on his way to Marseilles with Nash's cousin, and it could have been done while Sheppard slept. But father believed that I had slipped in, and killed the fellow. So he confessed to save me."

Bailey pressed her cold fingers reassuringly. "It was very noble—very self-sacrificing of you both. But why did *you* assume the blame, Monsieur Bertal?"

"I," said the chemist, "his ascetic lips tightening, "was once a member of the London Bank Gang. I am an Englishman, though I have lived so long in France that I have almost forgotten the fact. Nash, with Sheppard's connivance, did me a great wrong—never mind what. I pretended to have forgotten, and aided him while he was in Marseilles. But I had not forgotten—the old scars were still open. Through him I came to know Denise, and love her as a father. I writhed impotently at his treatment of her, which, to a girl of her spirit, was intolerable. When Sheppard was killed I had reasons to believe that she had done it, though there were others just as eager. When I learned of her arrest I decided to sacrifice myself for her. I am old and of little use—while she— Well, it doesn't matter.

"Sheppard, I suppose, had intended carrying nothing on his person that would identify him if anything happened. But he overlooked one of my cards. It was probably due to that that Nash believed I had killed his cousin, and in revenge sent his apaches to erase me from the scheme of things. I apologize for striking you, Bailey, but I wanted them to succeed, for I am very tired of life."

"Have you anything to say, Nash?" asked the agent.

"Everything they've said is true," Beau growled. "But I'd like to know who killed Johnny—damn his murderer!"

"The man who killed Sheppard thought he was you."

Nash looked at Bailey with narrowing eyes.

"Who was it? You've got me just

as you caught Eddie Lenoir, and the rest of the old gang, but I'm satisfied so long as Mazie is safe. If those apaches of mine had been just a bit quicker they would have killed you, and my plan would have worked out perfectly. But they didn't. Now, the least you can do is to tell me who killed Johnny Sheppard."

Bill touched a bell on the prefect's desk. Two burly gendarmes came in with a stoop-shouldered, slack-chinned man of middle age between them—the man who had annoyed Bailey with his chatter in the Restaurant Haxo the day before.

"Harry Carstairs, by God!" cried Nash, taking an involuntary step backward.

"The murderer of John Sheppard, Beau," said Bailey quietly, "and the man whose wife and fortune you stole—"

"I—I—why, I thought he was dead. How—how did you find him, Bailey—"

"I'll admit that it was as much a matter of good luck as judgment," the agent admitted. "Every indication pointed to Sheppard having been murdered in mistake for Nash. In his day the Beau made many enemies, but the man who had most cause to hate him was Harry Carstairs. The case is notorious even yet in the criminal circles of London. But Carstairs had disappeared—dropped out of sight entirely. He was reported to have died in Antwerp years ago."

Sheppard had been killed by someone on the train—someone in his particular car. I eliminated the three passengers—Mademoiselle Girard, Madame Berthier and Monsieur Robert. That should leave only a member of the train crew. I examined the roof of the car. By the scratches of hobnailed shoes, it was apparent that someone had laid there, then swung down to the steps. I

knew that in his earlier days Carstairs had been a railroader on the Midland and Sussex. Then, like a flash, I recalled a conversation I had heard in the Restaurant Haxo yesterday afternoon—a railway man berating an inferior for having kept out of sight all the way from Paris to Marseilles.

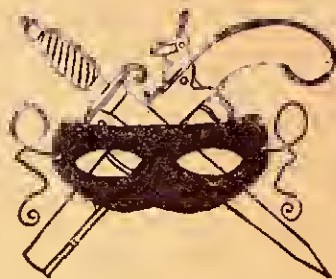
"So I lined up the crew, and picked out the man who had been in the restaurant. He denied any knowledge of the crime, of course. When I called

him Carstairs, and outlined what I believed to have happened, he broke down, and confessed that he actually committed the crime.

"In the words of the song, that's all there is, there isn't any more." He took Denise's hand, "except for one thing. Will you come to America with me?"

She bowed her splendid head.

"Yes," she whispered, "I'll go anywhere in the world—with you!"



The Best New Mystery Books

By Captain Frank Cunningham

In this department THE BLACK MASK will present every month brief reviews of the best new books of detective and mystery stories, stories of the occult and stories of adventure. Needless to say, the department will be conducted without fear or favor. Only *good* books will be noticed. There will be absolutely no boosting in the interest of publishers. Every book mentioned may be bought at any bookstore. THE BLACK MASK will NOT receive orders.

I

THE UNLATCHED DOOR, by Lee Thayer.—This is the rather conventional murder mystery story. The problem of "who killed Cock Robin" in this plot involves a New York patrician, Richard Van Loo Schuyler (get the name!), who stumbles into the wrong house one night in those old days before prohibition made such mistakes impossible, and finds upon the floor a beautiful woman who has been murdered. Of course he leaves in a hurry, but—the secret is disclosed in next to the last chapter.

* * *

II

TRAILIN', by Max Brand.—When you grow weary of mysteries, detectives, stolen jewels, and falsely accused heroines, and want a story of action, cowboys, gun play and lariat throwing, here is a story that you will like. The scene is laid in the lonely hills of Nebraska.

* * *

III

THE PREVENTIVE MAN, By G. V. McFadden.—Do you care for smugglers? And do you like the romance of a dark and stormy night, silent ships that bring in stolen goods, and a mysterious house that is locked and barred?

If so, here is a thrill or two, and a good story for the idle hours. However, I should warn you that the story takes place in the year 1830, which may or may not lead you to expect too much of those good old days.

* * *

IV

UNEASY STREET, by Arthur Somers Roche.—If you live in the Middle West you will be thrilled at this story of the night life of New York City. If you live in New York, you will be interested in reading about those things which you never see—provided, of course, that you go to bed at ten o'clock like all good New Yorkers. But there is mystery, romance, adventure, love, business, thrills, and so forth in this well-written story.

* * *

V

THE KILLER, by Stewart Edward White.—This is a book of short stories and sketches, the scenes of which are for the most part laid in Arizona and the old West. If you want to know what life in Arizona really used to be like, read the last three essays in the book that tell of hunting goats in the mountains, crossing the deserts and the

ranches in the old days. The short stories are also very interesting.

* * *

VI

THE DUKE OF CHIMNEY BUTTE, by G. W. Ogden.—Our hero goes west to the Bad Lands and the Little Missouri. At first the ranchers believe him to be a tenderfoot and he is given the nickname of the "Duke." But he proves that he has good stuff in him and makes his fortune, besides winning the girl he loved, who is at first his sworn enemy. But then who wouldn't take a dare and race a horse alongside of a train and snatch a handkerchief from the hands of a good-looking woman?

* * *

VII

THE MELWOOD MYSTERY, by James Hay.—A beautiful woman, a German spy, is both stabbed and shot. This furnishes the mystery that keeps this story at a gallop until the crime—if you could call it a crime in this case—is solved. Unlike most stories of this nature, there is more than one detective at work on the case. And the man who finally discovers the truth seems at first the biggest hayseed of the lot. This is a thrilling story well told.

* * *

VIII

SAILOR GIRL, by Frederick F. Moore.—A story of the Philippines, the sea,

and some stolen pearls. As the title suggests, this tale has a heroine instead of a hero. There is something doing all the time, plenty of fights, escapes and exciting adventures. You'd better read this story before the movies get hold of it.

* * *

IX

THE GOLDEN SCORPION, by Sax Rohmer.—There are illustrations in this book, but they aren't necessary. For the story is so full of splendid descriptions that your imagination is always stimulated. The plot concerns an Oriental mystery that revolves about a small ornament—the tail of a scorpion in gold, emblem of a group of arch criminals. Sax Rohmer knows how to write a sensational yarn that keeps the reader thrilled and breathless until the last page.

* * *

X

AN UNCONSCIOUS CRUSADER, by Sidney Williams.—This is an unconventional story of a newspaper reporter, and is heartily recommended if you like the sort of yarn that tells how the struggling, ambitious young man becomes famous, wealthy and married despite many handicaps. Politics—honest and involved—also play a part in this typically American story.



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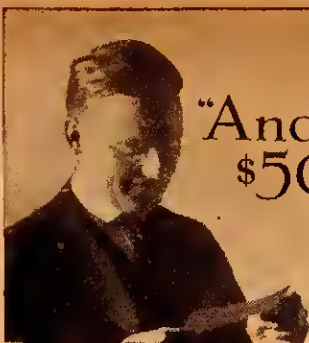
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.....Architect.	\$5,000 to \$15,000Lawyer.	\$5,000 to \$15,000
.....Building Contractor.	\$5,000 to \$10,000Mechanical Engineer.	\$1,000 to \$15,000
.....Automobile Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	.....Shop Superintendent.	\$3,000 to \$7,000
.....Automobile Repairman.	\$2,500 to \$4,000	.....Employment Manager.	\$1,000 to \$10,000
.....Civil Engineer.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	.....Steam Engineer.	\$2,000 to \$4,000
.....Structural Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	.....Foreman's Course.	\$2,000 to \$4,000
.....Business Manager.	\$5,000 to \$15,000	.....Photoplay Writer.	\$2,000 to \$10,000
.....Certified Public Accountant.	\$7,000 to \$15,000	.....Sanitary Engineer.	\$2,000 to \$5,000
.....Accountant and Auditor.	\$2,500 to \$7,000	.....Telephone Engineer.	\$2,500 to \$5,000
.....Draftsman and Designer.	\$2,500 to \$4,000	.....Telegraph Engineer.	\$2,500 to \$5,000
.....Electrical Engineer.	\$4,000 to \$10,000	.....High School Graduate.	In two years.
.....General Education.	In one year.Fire Insurance Expert.	\$3,000 to \$10,000

Name..... Address.....

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1 pound pure Baking Powder45
1 4-oz. bottle Vanilla Flavor Extract	.52
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